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HISTORY of WAR



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ON THE FIRST
TANK CHARGE



VC HERO
OF THIEPVAL
RIDGE

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

SOMME

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Welcome

**“They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them”**

– Extract from ‘For the Fallen’ (1914), Robert Laurence Binyon

A century ago this year, the bloodiest campaign of World War I erupted in northern France. After starting with the worst single day in British military history, it would rage for nearly five months, with over a million casualties.

Though in the UK the tragedy of the first day and those that followed are still keenly felt, France, Germany, and countries from all over the Commonwealth were no less deeply affected.

The memories and experiences of the Somme are important to world history, not just British, and this year’s centenary adds even more

poignancy to the commemorations and acts of remembrance being shared around the globe – this issue is our small contribution.



Tim

Tim Williamson
Editor



EMAIL

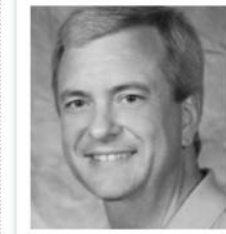
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CONTRIBUTORS



TOM GARNER

Tom has been mentally entrenched at the Somme this month, conducting interviews and researching his articles for our centenary feature. Somehow he also found time to write the Operator’s Handbook on the F-111 Aardvark (page 86)



MICHAEL HASKEEW

This issue Mike takes to the skies above China during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45), with the famous Flying Tigers. Find out how these mercenary American pilots dominated the skies, against all the odds, over on page 64.



MIGUEL MIRANDA

In the wake of the collapse of the USSR, Armenia and Azerbaijan went to war over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. As Miguel investigates this issue, it’s a conflict that is still just as heated as it was over 26 years ago (page 76).

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The grave of an ‘Unknown British Soldier’ photographed near Thiepval, September 1916



SOMME



1916-2016

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PROFESSOR WILLIAM PHILPOTT

William is Professor of the History of Warfare at King's College London, with a specific interest in the French army in WWI. Here he gives his assessment of just why the French divisions experienced such great success on 1 July.

26 War poetry



GRACE FREEMAN

Grace is a committee member of the Wilfred Owen Association and a Literature graduate with a research interest in Great War poetry. Starting on page 26 she presents four poems and the stories of the poets behind them, with a unique connection to the battlefield.

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TOM GARNER

History of War's Staff Writer uncovers the tragic story of Britain's Pals Battalions, the volunteer units that were infamously "Two years in the making. Ten minutes in the destroying."

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PROFESSOR PETER DOYLE



Peter is an expert in battlefield archaeology and material culture of the 20th century. He has selected five of his favourite artefacts and locations from his book *The First World War In 100 Objects*.

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PETER PRICE

History of War's Research Editor has turned his attention to the assault on Thiepval Ridge. He recounts incredible story of how Second Lieutenant Tom Adlam earned this prestigious medal.

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MAJOR-GENERAL JULIAN THOMPSON

Julian served in the Royal Marines for 34 years before turning to military history. In our interview on page 40, he discusses how the battle changed the British and world militaries forever.

46 First charge of the tank



DAN SNOW

In September 1916, tanks made their battlefield debut during the British offensive at Flers-Courcelette. Television presenter and historian Dan spoke with us about this momentous event, and just what it was like fighting with, and against, these fledgling war machines.

48 Wacht an der Somme



ROBIN SCHÄFER

Rob is an historian, writer, researcher and battlefield guide, with an expertise in the German military during the 19th and 20th centuries. Here he takes a look at the experiences of German soldiers during the campaign, with the help of first-hand accounts from the men who fought and died.

52 Nursing on the frontline



DR PENNY STARNS

Penny is a writer and researcher specialising in the history of medicine, but also worked as an ICU nurse for 20 years. On page 52, she discusses the horrific challenges that faced volunteers and nursing staff as they treated the wounded returning from the campaign.

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64 Aces high: the Flying Tigers

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This terrifying relic of the English Civil War will make you think twice about desertion





WAR
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GET YOUR SOUVENIR SHOT!

Taken: 23 July 1916

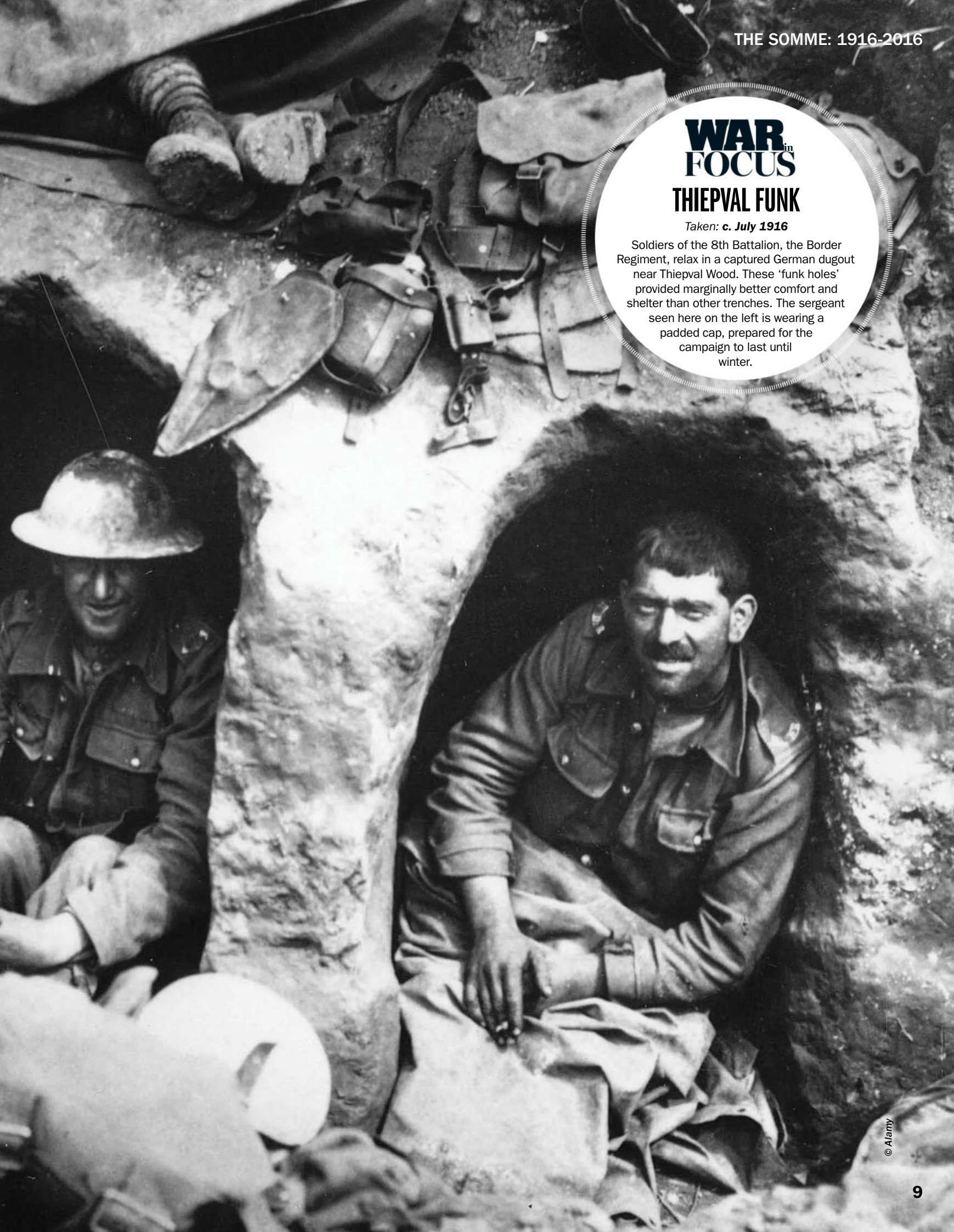
Men of the 1st Anzac Division pose after taking part in the Battle of Pozières Ridge – some wearing pickelhaubes taken as souvenirs. Three Australian divisions took part in the assault on the small village of Pozières, and suffered heavy casualties defending against German counterattacks.



WAR
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THIEPVAL FUNK

Taken: c. July 1916

Soldiers of the 8th Battalion, the Border Regiment, relax in a captured German dugout near Thiepval Wood. These 'funk holes' provided marginally better comfort and shelter than other trenches. The sergeant seen here on the left is wearing a padded cap, prepared for the campaign to last until winter.



WAR
in
FOCUS

**AT THE GOING DOWN
OF THE SUN**

Taken: 27 March 2014

Rain clouds obscure sunset over the Thiepval Memorial, where the names of over 72,000 servicemen from the United Kingdom and South Africa are commemorated. A majority of those named have no known grave.



WAR
in
FOCUS

IN THE AFTERMATH

Taken: January 1917

A German sentry keeps watch in the wake of a failed British cavalry attack. After the final offensives of the Somme in November 1916, both sides set in for a harsh winter on the battlefield. When the weather improved, the British began operations along the Ancre, gradually pushing further into German territory.





SOMME TIMELINE



What was supposed to be a swift, decisive breakthrough of the German lines turned into four and a half months of mayhem and bloodshed



British troops returning to their lines after a failed attack on Hawthorn Ridge, the location of one of the largest detonations on the first day

FIRST DAY

Just before 7.30am, the offensive began with the detonation of 19 mines beneath the German lines, the largest of these being under Beaumont-Hamel and La Boisselle. Despite the severity of these explosions, advancing troops still met stiff German resistance and a bloodbath ensued.

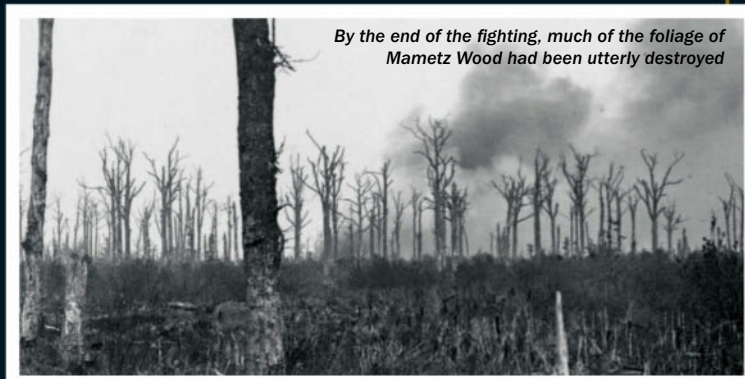
1 July

7-12 July

14-17 July

THE STRUGGLE FOR MAMETZ WOOD

Though it had been a first-day objective, the 38th Welsh Division assaulted this position for a gruelling six days at the loss of nearly 4,000 men. The Wood saw brutal close-quarter fighting and changed hands several times.



By the end of the fighting, much of the foliage of Mametz Wood had been utterly destroyed

THE BATTLE OF BAZENTIN RIDGE

In the early hours of 14 July, 22,000 men crept up to within 100 metres of the German lines at Bazentin le Petit, Bazentin le Grand, Trones Wood and Longueval. Despite overwhelming initial success, the attack eventually stalled and other key objectives such as High Wood were not taken.

Below: German and British wounded make their way to the rear after the tough battle for Bazentin Ridge





Illustration: Jean-Michel Girard - The Art Agency



Above: A pack horse loaded with trench boots near Beaumont-Hamel, November 1916

THE FINAL PUSH

Among the last major offensives of the campaign were at Beaucourt, Beaumont-Hamel, Redan Ridge and Serre, by General Sir Hubert Gough's Fifth Army. Of these first-day objectives, Serre and Redan Ridge remained in enemy hands when Field Marshal Haig called an end to the offensive, almost five months after it had begun.



A Mark I tank of C Company, with a shell hole clearly visible on the side, ditched north of Bouleaux Wood

FLERS-COURCELETTE

Though 150 were intended to make their debuts on the battlefield, only around 32 Mark I tanks arrived in working order for this attack. Though both the villages of Flers and Courcelette were eventually secured, the attack did not achieve the great breakthrough that was hoped for.



Left: Men of the 2nd Gordon Highlanders took part in the failed attack on Wood Lane on 20 July

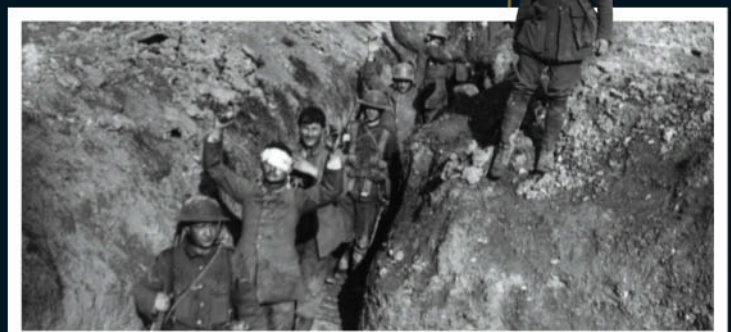
HIGH WOOD

On 20 July, men of the 1st Cameronians, 5th Scottish Rifles and the 20th Royal Fusiliers attacked High Wood in an attempt to dislodge the tough German defenders. Men from the 2nd Gordon Highlanders and 8th Devons attacked Wood Lane - a strong defensive trench leading up to the wood. This crucial position changed hands several times for two gruelling months before the British finally took it on 15 September.

THIEPVAL RIDGE

After a heavy preliminary bombardment, this push spanned from the village of Courcelette on the right, across to the German Schwaben Redoubt on the left. The objective was the village of Thiepval, which had failed to be taken on the first day.

Below: Wounded prisoners are escorted to the rear after the Battle of Thiepval Ridge



Images: Alamy, Getty

STAGES OF THE CAMPAIGN

The British and French lines crept forward for nearly five months

1 PRELIMINARY BOMBARDMENT

GERMAN FRONTLINE, 24-30 JUNE 1916

For seven days, over 1.7 million shells are fired onto the German positions in an attempt to obliterate the wire and destroy any significant defences. However, the shells fail to make any significant impact on the sturdy German bunkers, dug deep into the chalk ground.

Below: Members of the Royal Garrison Artillery prepare the fuses of Howitzer shells in preparation for the bombardment

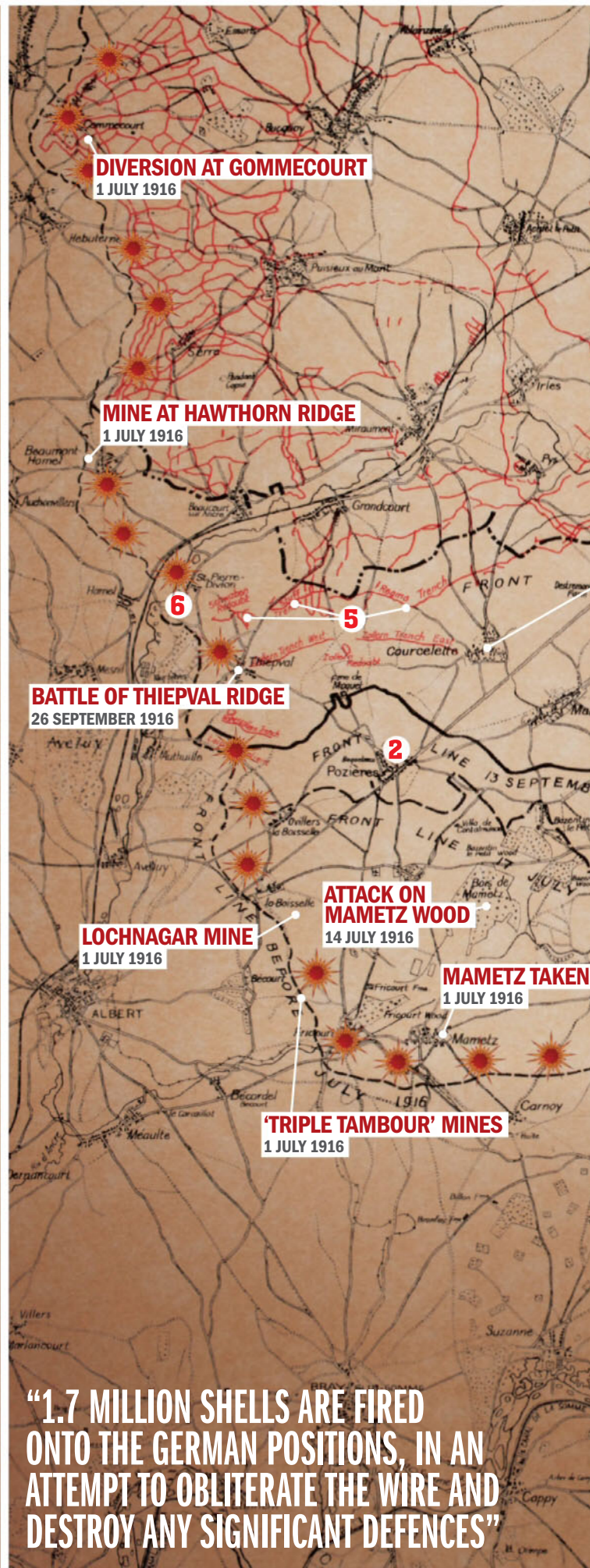


2 BATTLE OF POZIÈRES

POZIÈRES, 19 JULY-7 AUGUST 1916

After capturing over half of the village on 23 July, the Australian 1st Division was relentlessly bombarded by German artillery and was forced to fend off numerous counterattacks. Four days later, the division was relieved having suffered over 5,200 casualties. The Australian 2nd Division took over and made further assaults to push the enemy out of Pozzières, but suffered over 6,800 casualties from bombardments and counterattacks.

Below: The memorial dedicated to the 1st Australian Division, Pozzières, France



“1.7 MILLION SHELLS ARE FIRED ONTO THE GERMAN POSITIONS, IN AN ATTEMPT TO OBLITERATE THE WIRE AND DESTROY ANY SIGNIFICANT DEFENCES”

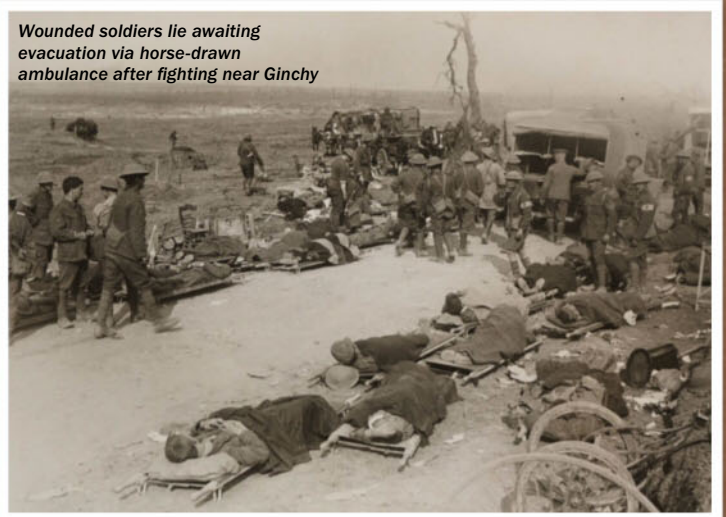


3 16TH IRISH TAKE GINCHY -

GINCHY, 9 SEPTEMBER 1916

After a preliminary bombardment by British artillery, the 16th Irish Division began the attack on the German-held village of Ginchy in the afternoon of 9 September. Despite losing a large number of officers, the 16th Division took the village and held it, before the frontline was shortly pushed forward again during the Battle of Flers-Courcelette.

Wounded soldiers lie awaiting evacuation via horse-drawn ambulance after fighting near Ginchy



4 PUSHING UP TO MORVAL

MORVAL, 25-28 SEPTEMBER 1916

After the success of Flers-Courcelette, a series of successful small Anglo-French operations captured the villages of Lesboeufs, Gueudecourt and Morval, which had already been largely destroyed by the battle. On 28 September, the French line on the extreme right of the British front was extended in preparation for an attack on Sailly-Saillisel.

5 STRUGGLE FOR THE HEIGHTS

THIEPVAL RIDGE, 1 OCTOBER - 10 NOVEMBER 1916

Three enemy strong points, along the high ground of Thiepval Ridge, prevented the British from making further advances in the Autumn: the Schwaben Redoubt, Stuff Redoubt and the Regina Trench. All these positions had withstood attacks since July, but were finally overwhelmed by 10 November, in preparation for a final push along the Ancre tribute.



Troops positioned near the Ancre enjoy a hot meal, October 1916

6 LAST ASSAULT ALONG THE ANCRE

ANCRE, 13-18 NOVEMBER 1916

At 5.45am, amid heavy artillery and thick fog, the Fifth Army attacked along the Somme's tributary towards Serre, Beaumont-Hamel and St Pierre Divion. The latter two objectives were taken, at great cost and in worsening weather conditions, and all operations were called off on 18 November.

1 JULY 1916

WORDS TOM GARNER

As the British and French armies launched their long-awaited offensive, few could have predicted the tragedy and chaos that was about to unfold

OPPOSING FORCES



vs



ENTENTE ALLIES

LEADERS

Douglas Haig,
Ferdinand Foch

FORCES

BRITAIN: 3rd & 4th
Armies
FRANCE: 6th Army

GERMAN EMPIRE

LEADERS

Max von Gallwitz,
Fritz von Below

FORCES

GERMANY:
2nd Army



One of the most famous images of WWI was taken on 1 July. The scene depicts a ration party of British soldiers in a communication trench

Many years after the event, a German infantryman called Stefan Westmann recalled the first moments of the Somme: “The British Army went over the top. The very moment we felt that the British artillery fire was directed against the reserve positions, machine gunners, German machine gunners, crawled out of the bunkers, red-eyed, sunken eyes, dirty, full of blood [from] their fallen comrades, and opened up a terrific fire. The British Army had horrible losses.”

Even this nightmarish description would prove to be an understatement. 1 July 1916 was the worst day for casualties in the entire history of the British Army and a disastrous beginning to a campaign that has become synonymous with the futile, deadly offensives of the Great War. Tragically, it was not meant to be this way. The war may have ended in 1918, but the Somme was planned to be the offensive that would end the war two years earlier. Because it so obviously failed, it has been tainted as a monumental blunder ever since, despite evidence for a number of small successes on its first day and a level of strategic planning that was often ill-judged but highly ambitious and detailed.

By 1916, the war had long descended into a static nightmare. Contrary to popular predictions, it had not finished by Christmas 1914 and the armies of Britain, France and Germany were locked in a deadly stalemate in

the trenches of the Western Front, stretching from the English Channel to the Swiss border. Throughout 1915, there had been a series of offensives against the invading Germans, but these had made little progress and resulted in huge casualties. The French lost 335,000 men during offensives at Artois and Champagne, while the British had lost tens of thousands of men at Loos and Aubers Ridge-Festubert.

To make matters worse, the Germans had deployed poison gas on a large scale for the first time at the Second Battle of Ypres in Belgium, forcing the British to abandon part of the Ypres sector. The Entente allies were caught in an unsatisfactory defensive position along the Franco-Belgian border and, on 6 December 1915, the high command met to discuss the war’s progress. The Chantilly Conference resulted in an agreement between the British and French for a huge combined offensive with the maximum forces available and in the quickest time possible.

“1 JULY 1916 WAS THE WORST DAY FOR CASUALTIES IN THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH ARMY”

French general Joseph Joffre proposed that the offensive should take place in the area that overlooked the River Somme. The British did not believe there was strategic merit in his plan, apart from the fact that the British Third Army was located on the Somme and would have to take part alongside the French. The British went away to mull over the plans.

After Chantilly, General Sir Douglas Haig took over command of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) on 19 December, and agreed with Joffre's plan. The Somme sector was ill-suited for an offensive, as its chalky soil was ideal for digging defensive positions and the British would be attacking the German 'belly' of their line, an area that bulged forwards, towards Allied positions. Even if a breakthrough were achieved, it risked leading nowhere.

Haig proposed an alternative offensive centred on Messines, an area that was close enough to the coast to be supported by the Royal Navy. This plan might have worked, as the German defences here were not as formidable as they would soon become in 1917, and Haig was willing to wait for newly invented tanks to help the advance. However, after the German offensive at Verdun was launched in February 1916, this plan was hastily abandoned. The French were forced to throw in the bulk of their troops to prevent this sector from falling, and Allied priorities rapidly changed. The British now had to take the bulk of responsibility for the

Somme offensive, but it was the French who chose the time and place for the battle. Haig, who was fighting on French soil, acquiesced to French wishes where possible and the date for the offensive was set: 1 July 1916.

The worst laid plans?

Once the offensive was agreed, Haig and his subordinates created an ambitious plan for the battle. It was divided into several phases, down a 40-kilometre-long front. To begin with, Henry Rawlinson's Fourth Army was to capture enemy positions on a line between Serre and Montauban, while Edmund Allenby's Third Army would attack Gommecourt as a diversion. The Fourth Army would then swing to the left to capture the German second line from the River Ancre to Pozières, then attack to the right, south of the Albert-Bapaume road, followed by a further advance onto the German third line, which included Le Sars, Flers and Morval.

If these attacks were successful, then three cavalry divisions would advance in different directions towards Arras. To support the British, the French Sixth Army would attack to Rawlinson's right. If everything went well, the British planned to reach Cambrai and Douai in order to break the German line in half.

These plans were complicated, but the Allies could not hope to progress without first destroying the dense German defences of barbed wire, trenches and artillery. To that end, Haig planned a seven-day artillery bombardment to destroy the German positions before the general advance. The British Fourth Army had 1,010 field guns and howitzers, 182 heavy guns and 245 heavy howitzers. What sounds like a large arsenal was actually insufficient for the task in hand and the British

"MOST OF THE SOLDIERS WERE CONVINCED THAT THE 'BIG PUSH' WOULD BE THE KEY TO WINNING THE WAR"

had an inadequate amount of artillery, except for heavy guns. Also, shrapnel did not always cut wire effectively, but it was the only high explosive available in 1916.

At this point in the war, the British Army was largely untested as a fighting force. In 1914, the BEF had been a highly professional but small army and it had suffered severe losses in the opening stages of the conflict, requiring it to be virtually replaced by volunteers.

In an 18-month period the BEF underwent a tenfold expansion and by mid-1916 Haig had hundreds of thousands of men at his disposal, but his troops were highly inexperienced. Training an effective army takes time but in 1916 speed was of the essence and even equipment was scarce in the British ranks. In the case of the artillery, the new gunners had to train with logs and only practiced at camp for a few weeks before being dispatched to the front. The volunteers had joined up on a wave of enthusiastic patriotism and many had been formed into 'Pals Battalions' consisting of local men from the same towns, but their keenness to fight did not necessarily equate to fighting ability and for many the upcoming offensive would be their first test. The deficiencies were not particularly noticed at the time, most of the soldiers were convinced that the 'Big Push' would be the key to winning the war.



British gunners fire a 15-inch howitzer on 1 July. A huge, seven-day artillery barrage failed to break the German defences prior to the battle



For eight days before 1 July, the Royal Artillery bombarded the German lines and in this time over 1.6 million shells were fired. A British signaller, Harry Wheeler, recalled its intensity: "Shells bursting all the time, guns firing, all the time. Those poor boys who had to go through it! I shall never get it out of my memory. Yes, the dance of hell." On the other side, Stefan Westmann, a German soldier, had to endure the barrage: "Day and night the shells came upon us. Our dugouts crumbled. They fell upon us and we had to dig ourselves and our comrades out. Sometimes we found them suffocated, sometimes smashed to pulp... We had nothing to eat or drink, but constantly, shell after shell burst upon us."

Although the Germans suffered terribly under the barrage, the bombardment did not have the desired effect. It failed to destroy the barbed wire or many of the Germans' dugouts and bunkers, which were reinforced with concrete, and many of the British shells did not detonate upon impact. The British knew none of this, however, and by the morning of 1 July it was time for the offensive to begin.

'Zero Hour'

Just before 7.30am (code-named 'Zero Hour') the barrage suddenly stopped and 17 huge mines were detonated in No Man's Land near the German lines. Assembled in miles of trenches were three Allied armies, two British and one French. In total there were approximately 120,000 men divided into 27 divisions ready to attack, of which 80 per cent belonged to the BEF. Against them were 16 supposedly destroyed German divisions but the British were about to receive a nasty shock. Throughout the bombardment, the Germans



Sunlight in a broken landscape. The Battle of the Somme began on a hot summer's day, with minimal cloud cover

TUNNELS OF DEATH

DIGGING AND PLANTING MINES UNDER THE GERMAN TRENCHES WAS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE BRITISH STRATEGY, BUT IT WAS EXCEPTIONALLY HARD AND DANGEROUS WORK

One of the most dangerous tasks on the Western Front was tunnelling. Like siege mining in earlier ages, tunnels were dug to undermine the enemy's defences, but on an industrial scale. Both sides dug under No Man's Land from shafts that were begun far in the rear. Once the gallery was long enough, large chambers were constructed under enemy trenches and filled with explosives. The tunnel was now a gigantic mine to be detonated, with the potential to cause great chaos and destruction.

Unlike the noise of the battles above ground, tunnellers had to work in complete silence in order to detect enemy counter-tunnels and to not give away their own positions. The work was hot, claustrophobic and laborious. The soil of the Somme was chalky and the tunnellers would have to slowly prize out the chalk, which would then be caught by hand by another man as it fell. A successful day's digging would often not be measured in yards, but in inches.

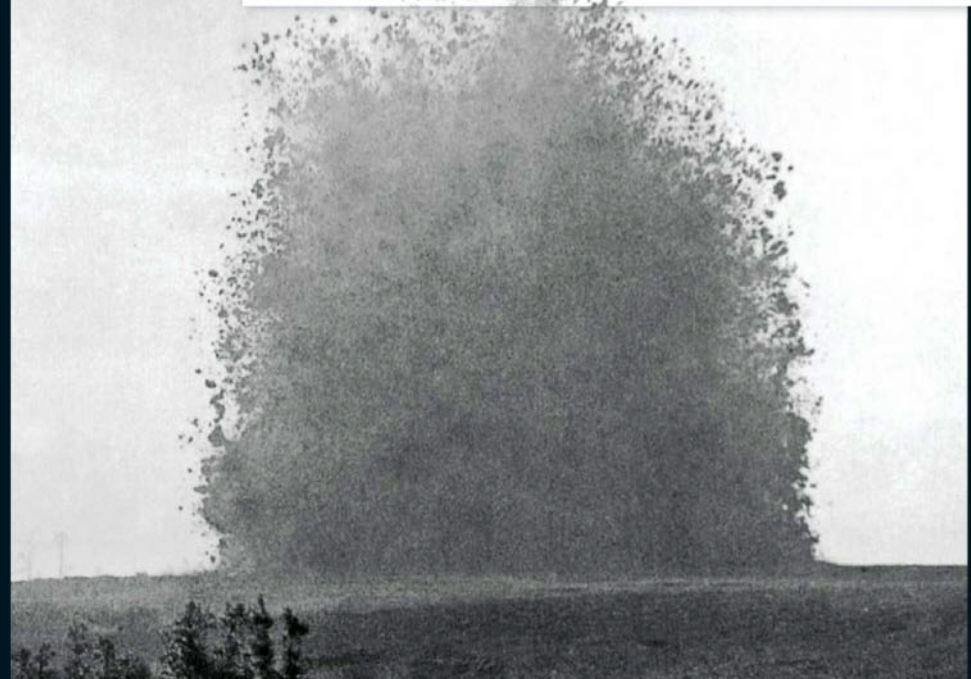
Right: Tunnellers laying a charge some time in July 1916. The officer on the left is using a geophone, a large stethoscope that was used to detect enemy tunnelling

Below: The Hawthorn Redoubt mine was detonated by the British at 7.20am on 1 July, and the resulting explosion was caught on film by Geoffrey Malins

In June 1916, the British had 32 tunnelling companies consisting of 25,000 men. For 1 July, 17 mines of varying sizes were detonated before Zero Hour in order to surprise the Germans and occupy the resulting craters before the enemy could react. Two mines had a combined explosive content of 100,600 pounds and one of the biggest was the 1,000-foot-long Hawthorn Redoubt mine.

It was detonated at 7.20am and filmed by cameraman Geoffrey Malins who said, "The ground where I stood gave a mighty convulsion. I gripped hold of my tripod to steady myself. Then the earth rose high in the air to the height of hundreds of feet. Higher and higher it rose, and with a grinding roar the earth settled back on itself, leaving in its place a mountain of smoke."

Despite the dramatic explosion, the mine was detonated too early and the Germans occupied the crater before the British could reach it after Zero Hour. Unfortunately, the efforts of the tunnellers did not equate to tactical success above ground.



had been sheltering in concrete bunkers, which had largely withstood the attack, giving them a strong sense that an offensive was imminent – they even started to bombard the British lines with their own artillery. As soon as the barrage lifted, they climbed out of their dugouts and set up machine guns all along the front in preparation for the imminent British assault.

Once the mines had detonated, officers blew their whistles and the infantry began to advance, starting one of the biggest battles in history. It was a cloudless day, but things went immediately wrong. Private Arthur Pearson recalled, “At Zero Hour, we climbed out of the trenches and not a man hesitated. When I ran up the rise out of the trench I was under the hail of bullets, which were whizzing over my head. Most of our fellows were killed kneeling on the fire-step.” The soldiers had been told to advance slowly towards the German lines, which proved useless against machine guns.

Maurice Symes, present at the battle, said, “It was just as if we were at a training exercise, which was absolutely mad when you think of it. We were sitting ducks, straight into the death trap, hundreds of us. Just hopeless.”

In one of the most famous incidents of Zero Hour, an officer called Alfred Irwin remembered a tragic attempt by Captain Wilfred Nevill to boost morale during the advance, “Captain Nevill thought it might be helpful if he could furnish each platoon with a football and allow them to kick it forward and follow it. If a man came across a football he could kick it forward but he mustn’t chase after it. I think it did help them enormously. But they suffered terribly. Nevill and his second captain were both killed.”

In the northern sector, the British attacked Gommecourt as planned and some men of the 56th Division reached the first line of the German trenches only to be counterattacked by 2nd Guards Reserve Division. The 56th Division only returned to their trenches when they ran out of ammunition and left 1,300 dead. Similarly, two battalions of Sherwood Foresters got into the first German trenches and reached the second line but they advanced too far and ended up surrounded by German counterattacks. 80 per cent of the battalions died and 31 men were taken prisoner.

A wounded man of the 29th Division is carried away from the front line. The casualty is the same man who was filmed in the ‘The Battle of the Somme’

“ALTHOUGH THE SOLDIERS CANNOT BE FAULTED FOR THEIR BRAVERY AND DETERMINATION, THE HARD TRUTH IS THAT THEY WERE MOSTLY INEXPERIENCED”

The objectives of VIII Corps (which included the 31st Division) were to take Serre and Beaumont-Hamel. The 31st Division mainly consisted of Pals Battalions from Yorkshire and had not been tested in battle before. As they advanced they were hit by German artillery, with the fire intensifying as they moved further forward, along with close-range machine gun fire. The assault completely failed and the Pals Battalions were slaughtered with at least 2,000 casualties before 8am. In one instance the majority of the 15th West Yorkshires (Leeds Pals) were killed in their trenches without going over the top and the Durham and Bradford were seen advancing on a ridge above Serre but none survived the advance. Otto Lais, a German officer, said: “Wild firing slammed into the masses of the enemy. All around us was the rushing, whistling and roaring of a storm. Belt after belt was fired. Despite the fact that hundreds are already lying dead, fresh waves [kept] emerging to assault the trenches.”

Some of the volunteer units were so keen that they even disobeyed orders and achieved surprising results. The 36th (Ulster) Division ignored their commanders and crept under the British barrage to within 100 yards of the German positions. At Zero Hour they jumped into the German trenches and surprised the emerging enemy. They even got to within a few yards of their objective at Grandcourt before being accidentally fired on by British artillery and then machine-gunned by flanking German dugouts, resulting in over 4,900 casualties.

An impossible task

This litany of murderous assaults was repeated all along the line and the ‘Big Push’ was failing disastrously, largely thanks to the ineffective British barrage. Arnold Dale, of the York and Lancaster Regiment, was appalled: “As we moved forward we saw what a terrible job it was to get through the German wire. It was so thick,

it looked solid black. In my opinion a rabbit couldn’t have got through it.”

The deep German dugouts were also mainly intact as Frank Raine of the Durham Light Infantry remembered: “We were told that there was going to be this bombardment that would knock the hell out of the Germans and all we had to do was get up and walk across – just walk straight through to Berlin. And there wasn’t one of us in our battalion that ever got to the German lines. You couldn’t! It was absolutely impossible. The Germans had these deep dugouts; they were safe as the bank. They were 30 feet down!”

These intact positions were particularly evident at a heavily fortified village at Fricourt, one of the key objectives of the battle. The men of XV Corps tried to outflank the village but the German machine gunners were well-fortified and mowed down waves of attackers. In one instance, the 50th Brigade attacked the village frontally and were cut down by the Germans who stood on their parapets to shoot them. Despite the carnage, there were some minor successes, particularly in the southern sector.

By mid-afternoon the village of Mametz was in British hands and the Germans eventually abandoned Fricourt but both were taken at heavy costs. Possibly the best results were achieved by the 18th Division who took all of their objectives in the Mametz-Montauban sector, including the formidable Pommiers Redoubt, which was captured during intense hand-to-hand fighting. Towards the French part of the line, the 30th Division managed to secure all of their objectives by 1pm, including the village of Montauban.

None of these objectives could be adequately followed up due to the sheer number of failed attacks and casualties. Soldiers, like Frederick Higgins, felt powerless to do anything, “I got a nasty stomach feeling that I can’t describe... abject fear. It takes all the stuffing out of you.



You just don't know what to do, whether to get up and go or stop where you are... It was a terrible, terrible feeling."

Donald Murray, part of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, recalled, "All I could see were men lying dead, men screaming, men on the barbed wire with their bowels hanging down, shrieking. I was just alone in a hell of fire and smoke and stink." By nightfall the British survivors returned to the trenches that they had thought they wouldn't have to see again, in an exhausted state. Private D Cattell said, "I went down into a bunk and I think I slept there for 18 hours. The Germans could have walked through if they wanted, there was nobody there."

Sunset on the first day

The first day of the Somme was an unmitigated disaster. The British suffered almost 58,000 casualties, of which 19,240 were dead. The French had lost 7,000 and the Germans 8,000. Even with the casualties of the next two years, and even into World War II, the British Army would never again lose so many soldiers in one day. There were many reasons for the catastrophe, with the chief cause being the failure of the artillery. Despite the eight-day barrage, there were never enough artillery pieces, while the shells were prone to not detonating and the shrapnel did not cut the German wire. It also did not help that the Germans were aware of the attack; their defences were exceptionally well made.

There were also problems with the infantry themselves. Although the soldiers cannot be faulted for their bravery and determination, the hard truth is that they were mostly inexperienced and German firepower killed 60 per cent of the British officers on the day, which often left the troops leaderless. The British were also poorly directed by their superiors. It is true that the high commands of every army on the Western Front had never experienced trench fighting before, and adjusting to industrial warfare took time.

However, the British generals made blunders that did give credence to the later cliché of 'lions led by donkeys'. The troops were ordered to walk slowly towards German lines, to maintain cohesion and a rigid formation; but this slow progression, laden with heavy equipment, made them easy targets. Also, the Allied frontline was 40 kilometres long, with the British taking up 25 kilometres of it. This made the advance too broad and displayed an inherent complacency that the Germans would crumble under the initial barrage.

The first-day failure meant that the battle continued until November. By then only 11 kilometres of ground had been taken with over 1,120,000 lost men from all armies, making the Battle of the Somme one of the bloodiest in history.

The slaughter of the first day remains the most shocking from a British perspective and it was keenly felt at home. One royal engineer, Thomas Dewing, recalled, "At the first church parade we'd had an idea what a shambles it had been. The infantry came in a mere handful. In each battalion, a mere handful of people. And the colonels sat in front of what was left of their battalions, sat there sobbing. Frankly the Battle of the Somme was a ghastly mistake."

British troops resting in a support trench after the attack on Beaumont-Hamel. Soldiers were dismayed to return to trenches they thought they were leaving for good



"THE FAILURE OF THE FIRST DAY MEANT THAT THE BATTLE CONTINUED UNTIL NOVEMBER. BY THEN ONLY 11 KILOMETRES OF GROUND HAD BEEN TAKEN WITH OVER 1,120,000 LOST MEN FROM ALL ARMIES, MAKING THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME ONE OF THE BLOODIEST IN HISTORY"

General Ferdinand Foch was instrumental in the planning and execution of the French victories during the Somme offensive but was harshly criticised afterwards

FRENCH SUCCESS ON 1 JULY

WORDS PROF. WILLIAM PHILPOTT

While the British experienced colossal casualties, the French army achieved its most successful offensive since the start of the trench war



Astride the Somme River on 1 July 1916, General Marie Émile Fayolle's Sixth Army struck the most effective blow yet delivered by French forces on the Western Front. At 7.30am, the first waves

of infantry leaped from their trenches with cries of 'vive la France!': they were full of confidence after watching the barrage pulverise the enemy's trenches for seven days.

Supported by concentrated artillery fire from heavy guns, which smashed the enemy's defensive positions, and 'soixante-quinze' field guns and trench mortars, which forced the defenders to stay in their dugouts, Fayolle's five front-line divisions seized the enemy's first position quickly. North of the river, the XX 'Iron' Corps overwhelmed the defenders of the

'Bois Y' defensive redoubt, bombing dugouts and bayoneting any dazed defenders who did not immediately surrender; then stormed the plateau. Hundreds of prisoners were captured.

Apart from Curlu village – tucked in the Somme valley, which held out until late afternoon – all XX Corps' objectives were taken by mid-morning. Attacking south of the river two hours later at 9.30am, I Colonial Corps seized the German first position and advanced rapidly two kilometres, to within striking distance of the enemy's second position.

By lunchtime, the French army's attack was over and the troops were digging in on their objectives in anticipation of the inevitable German counterattacks. These did not materialise, so rapid and shocking had been the blow; for the cost of only 1,600 casualties, mostly lightly wounded.

Sixth Army's attack demonstrated what was possible in 1916 with the right tactics and sufficient firepower, a method that General Ferdinand Foch, who directed the offensive, called 'scientific battle'. The attack's objectives were calculated according to the weight of supporting fire the guns could provide, and the advance was limited to the artillery's range. The infantry went forward in dispersed formations using infiltration tactics that are more familiar from the battles of 1918. These were lessons the French army had learned in its costly battles in Artois and Champagne in 1915.

Although General Rawlinson's tactical notes acknowledged that the French army's techniques had been studied by the British, experience counted for much. As French commander-in-chief Joseph Joffre noted of the British attack in his journal on 2 July, "The

French troops preparing to attack – location and date unknown



causes of their check are to be found in the bad artillery preparation and the failure to mop up the trenches passed by the first waves... the British do not yet have the 'way'."

Fayolle's veteran French troops – the XX Corps had fought in Artois and at Verdun – outclassed the keen but green volunteers of Kitchener's army. After witnessing their initial check, Joffre assigned Foch a subsidiary objective – 'train the English'.

Their way was to serve the French army well as the offensive continued. Fayolle, an artilleryman himself, would not mount attacks unless the guns had been brought forward to smash the German defences. South of the river on 2 July, colonial troops seized the German second position, having advanced their guns during night to pre-prepared forward positions for this purpose. Over the next few days, they followed up the retreating enemy onto the Flaucourt Plateau, high ground south of the river from which they could target artillery fire to support the advance to the north. In all, the Colonial Corps advanced seven kilometres before their advance was halted opposite the bend in the river in front of Péronne, the deepest penetration of the enemy's lines to date. Unfortunately, a flanking advance south of the river, however effective, was not going to overwhelm the main German defences on the Somme.

Thereafter Sixth Army confined its advance to the north bank of the river, in support of the British attack to the north. Once the British advance stalled on the Bazentin Ridge in mid-July, the French advance outpaced that of Rawlinson's army, fanning out on the

bluffs in front of the Bapaume-Péronne Road. Successive lines of defence were taken by repeated, well-prepared, set-piece attacks. In the interim, however, dealing with German counterattacks and undertaking local small-scale operations to improve the jumping-off line for the next attack would steadily use up French infantry reserves. Something more effective was needed.

When Foch revived the offensive with a series of co-ordinated blows by the French and British forces in September, the French army took the lead. General Alfred Micheler's Tenth Army joined the battle south of the river on 4 September. Fayolle's army struck several strong blows north of the river, finally breaking through the Germans' last line of defence along the Bapaume-Péronne road and into open country at Bochavesnes on 12 September. Unfortunately, this breach was too narrow to be exploited, and Foch reverted to his objective of wearing out the German army's reserves.

Only the onset of winter, which turned the battlefield into a quagmire and made progress difficult, saved the German army, whose manpower reserves were exhausted. The French attack stalled in mid-November in the muddy fields opposite Bois Saint-Pierre Vaast, a huge wood beyond the Bapaume-Péronne road that the Germans turned into a fortress. The year ended in anti-climax after the effort and sacrifice that the poilus had made for victory at the Somme and Verdun.

The French suffered 202,567 casualties in the entire Somme campaign, less than half the British total, while taking more ground north and south of the river and probably inflicting disproportionate losses on the enemy in front of them. It was a measure of their experience and technique developed during 1915's costly battles – the sort of apprenticeship the British army underwent on the Somme. Foch concluded that the Somme was, "A battle which worked, always victorious, beating the Germans, pushing them back. We should continue in this vein as far as we can, denying them any freedom of action and opportunity, continue to beat them." He was to put the offensive methods he developed on the Somme to good effect in 1918 when, as allied generalissimo, he drove the Germans from France in a sustained three-month offensive.

"ENGLAND'S BEST SWORD"

EVEN THOUGH VERDUN LIMITED THE FRENCH TROOPS AT THE SOMME, THEY STILL LAUNCHED AN UNEXPECTED BLOW

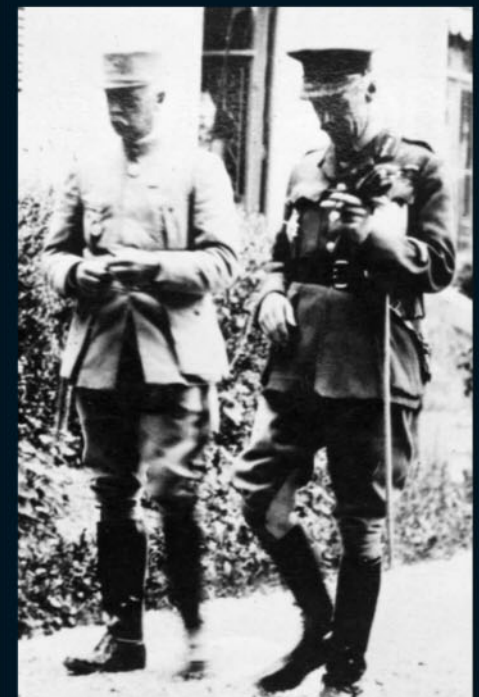
By June 1916 the French army had been engaged at Verdun for four months. The process of bleeding it white, that General von Falkenhayn had thought would bring the war to an end, had failed. Douglas Haig had seen the French suffer at Verdun, and came increasingly to believe that his army was now the main Allied offensive force. Joffre's demand that the Somme offensive should begin before Verdun exhausted the French army's reserves obliged Haig to advance the start date of the campaign, although his own troops were not yet fully trained.

Though the number of divisions the French could initially commit to the offensive reduced from 42 to 18, their fighting ability had not been affected as much as Haig believed. General Pétain's 'noria' (waterwheel) system steadily cycled divisions in and out of the Verdun battle before they were fought out. Therefore, the divisions committed to the Somme offensive maintained their potential.

On 1 July, some of France's elite formations – the XX 'Iron' Corps and the I Colonial Corps – began the offensive. Foch, who anticipated a long attritional battle, deliberately limited the number of divisions committed initially so that he would have a reserve to sustain the offensive for some months.

The Germans had not expected such a heavy blow on the French front – some had started to think they would not attack at all – and had concentrated their defensive strength opposite the British front where, rightly, they expected the main blow to be struck, and where a defeat would be more catastrophic.

Below: General Marie Émile Fayolle, commander of the French Sixth Army, in discussion with General Henry Rawlinson



Images: Alamy, Getty



The Adrian helmet was introduced to protect the head from falling shrapnel





BEFORE ACTION

WILLIAM NOEL HODGSON, MC

Written: 29 June 1916

By all the glories of the day
And the cool evening's benison
By that last sunset touch that lay
Upon the hills when day was done,
By beauty lavishly outpoured
And blessings carelessly received,
By all the days that I have lived
Make me a soldier, Lord.

By all of all man's hopes and fears
And all the wonders poets sing,
The laughter of unclouded years,
And every sad and lovely thing;
By the romantic ages stored
With high endeavour that was his,
By all his mad catastrophes
Make me a man, O Lord.

I, that on my familiar hill
Saw with uncomprehending eyes
A hundred of thy sunsets spill
Their fresh and sanguine sacrifice,
Ere the sun swings his noonday sword
Must say good-bye to all of this;
By all delights that I shall miss,
Help me to die, O Lord.

Lieutenant William Noel Hodgson was the Bombing Officer of the 9th Battalion Devonshire Regiment. Days before the Battle of the Somme began, the battalion was sheltering in a wood a few miles behind the British front line. It was during this time that Hodgson wrote *Before Action*, his final poem. On the morning of 1 July 1916, the Devonshires attempted to break into the German front line trenches, south of the village of Mametz. As soon as they left the cover of Mansel Copse and entered the open slope of No Man's Land, of which they had 400 yards to cross, the Germans opened fire. Hodgson was killed, along with over 160 comrades, and they were buried in their Mansel Copse trench, where they remain to this day.

Eight-inch howitzers of the 39th
Siege battery, Royal Garrison
Artillery, shell positions near
Fricourt in August 1916

© Alamy

THE PALS BATTALIONS

WORDS TOM GARNER

A massive propaganda drive and feverish patriotism saw communities join the British Army, but it would end tragically in a hail of machine-gun fire



Pals of the East Yorkshire Regiment cheerfully wave to the camera before marching into the trenches, before the Battle of the Somme



Out of all the destruction of 1914-18 there was a unique trauma that was borne out of a wave of public patriotism: the formation of the 'Pals Battalions'. The story of how large groups of

men joined up with their friends and family to serve Britain is one of the most poignant of the war. A disproportionate amount of those who volunteered died on the first day and whole communities were devastated.

When Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, its army was unique among the European powers for being manned by voluntary professionals, as well as its small size: the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) that was sent to France numbered only 120,000 men. Compared with the millions of conscripts in the French and German armies this was puny and it soon became apparent that the BEF was not big enough for the conflict that was unfolding.

A popular assumption was that the war would be over by Christmas 1914, but the Secretary

of State for War, Lord Kitchener, thought differently and devised a plan with General Sir Henry Rawlinson and Lord Derby to raise large 'New Armies'. Kitchener envisioned that the war would be decided by the last million men that Britain could throw into battle and Rawlinson felt that men would be more willing to enlist if they were serving alongside people they knew.

A call was issued for 100,000 volunteers, aged between 19-30, at least 1.6 metres tall and a chest size greater than 86 centimetres. The response was impressive with 30,000 men enlisting every day by the end of August 1914 and by mid-September over 500,000 had joined. At the end of the year another 500,000 had been added.

Although the Pals Battalions became associated with working-class men from northern industrial towns, financiers who worked in the City of London formed the very first battalion on 21 August 1914. This unit became the 10th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers but it was commonly known as the 'Stockbrokers Battalion'. This principle of enlisting with

workmates or friends was replicated across the whole country and Lord Derby coined the term 'Pals Battalions' in a speech to recruits in Liverpool on 28 August: "We have got to see this through to the bitter end and dictate our terms of peace in Berlin if it takes every man and every penny in the country. This should be a battalion of pals, a battalion in which friends from the same office will fight shoulder to shoulder for the honour of Britain."

This meant that battalions from all social classes, professions and backgrounds were formed. The Glasgow Tramways Battalion shared an employer, the Hull Commercial an occupation, and the Tyneside Irish a common ancestry. However, individuals enlisted for different reasons. Men volunteered because it was considered patriotic to enlist, particularly in the wake of continuous rumours about German atrocities in 'plucky little Belgium'. Some saw enlistment as an opportunity for travel in an age when most Britons could not afford to do so and they were bolstered with the general assurance that the war would not last long.

In many cases, army life was an escape from crippling poverty as military services offered regular pay, proper food and clothing, plus accommodation. Areas dominated by heavy industry provided a disproportionate supply of recruits, but many volunteers were rejected on medical grounds thanks to poor

**"WE HAVE GOT TO SEE THIS THROUGH TO THE BITTER END AND
DICTATE OUR TERMS OF PEACE IN BERLIN IF IT TAKES EVERY MAN
AND EVERY PENNY IN THE COUNTRY"**

BRITAIN'S DOOMED ARMIES

FOLLOWING A MASSIVE RECRUITMENT DRIVE, WHOLE COMMUNITIES JOINED UP IN WHAT WAS KNOWN AS 'KITCHENER'S ARMIES'



14TH, 15TH, 16TH
BATTALIONS,
ROYAL
WARWICKSHIRE
REGIMENT

THE BIRMINGHAM PALS
FORMED: 30 AUGUST 1914
STRENGTH: 3,000 MEN

These battalions were posted to Italy at different times during the war as well as serving on the Somme.



103RD BRIGADE,
ROYAL
NORTHUMBERLAND
FUSILIERS

TYNESIDE IRISH
FORMED: 14 OCTOBER 1914
STRENGTH: 5,400 MEN

After enthusiastically raising a whole brigade, the Tyneside Irish advanced on 1 July 1916 to the march of a bass drum but suffered heavy casualties.



10TH BATTALION
LINCOLNSHIRE
REGIMENT

GRIMSBY CHUMS
FORMED: SEPTEMBER 1914
STRENGTH: 1,000

Although the collective name for Lord Kitchener's 'New Armies' were 'Pals Battalions', Grimsby was the only unit out of around 304 battalions to be called 'Chums'.



16TH BATTALION,
MIDDLESEX
REGIMENT,
18TH- 21ST BATTALIONS,
ROYAL FUSILIERS

**PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BATTALIONS**
FORMED: 1-11 SEPTEMBER
1914

STRENGTH: 5,000 MEN
Exclusively made up of public schoolboys and university students, the volunteers were expected to become officers in other regiments. However, many chose to remain as privates in order to stay with their friends.



13TH-14TH BATTALIONS,
YORK & LANCASTER
REGIMENT

BARNSELY PALS
FORMED: SEPTEMBER-
NOVEMBER 1914
STRENGTH: 2,000 MEN

The 13th Battalion was first posted to Egypt before being sent to France in March 1916. On 1 July, the combined battalions suffered 545 casualties, a loss of over a quarter of their strength.

"THE VOLUNTEERS WERE EXPECTED TO BECOME OFFICERS IN OTHER REGIMENTS. HOWEVER, MANY CHOSE TO REMAIN AS PRIVATES IN ORDER TO STAY WITH THEIR FRIENDS"



17TH-20TH
BATTALIONS,
THE KING'S
(LIVERPOOL
REGIMENT)

LIVERPOOL PALS
FORMED: AUGUST 1914
STRENGTH: 4,000 MEN

The Liverpool Pals set the precedent for recruiting northern working men but its volunteers consisted of commercial workers including those who worked in shipping, insurance and brokerage.



10TH-13TH BATTALIONS,
LOCAL RESERVE
BATTALION,
EAST YORKSHIRE
REGIMENT

1ST HULL 'COMMERCIALS',
2ND HULL 'TRADESMEN',
3RD HULL 'SPORTSMEN',
4TH HULL 'T'OTHERS',
5TH HULL 'BANTAMS'
FORMED: SEPTEMBER-
NOVEMBER 1914
STRENGTH: 6,000 MEN

Occupations and interests divided battalions from Hull. The 'Commercials' were raised from clerks and businessmen, the 'Tradesmen' consisted of welders and joiners, 'Bantams' were men of 'smaller stature but big hearts' and 'T'Others' were men of any class or trade.



17TH BATTALION,
MIDDLESEX
REGIMENT

FOOTBALL BATTALION
FORMED: 15 DECEMBER 1914
STRENGTH: 600 MEN

Founded in Fulham, this battalion comprised of hundreds of professional footballers from 50 clubs including Chelsea, West Ham, Liverpool and Reading. They were also supplemented by amateur players, officials and fans.



16TH-23RD BATTALIONS,
MANCHESTER
REGIMENT

MANCHESTER REGIMENT
FORMED: AUGUST-
SEPTEMBER 1914
STRENGTH: 10,000 MEN

During the course of World War I the Manchester Pals lost 4,776 men out of almost 10,000. The Manchester Regiment in total lost 13,000 casualties, of which 37 per cent were from the Pals.



11TH EAST
LANCASHIRE
REGIMENT

ACCRINGTON PALS
FORMED: 14 SEPTEMBER
1914
STRENGTH: 1,100

The most famous Pals Battalion fought bravely on 1 July 1916 but were almost wiped out. The battalion included volunteers not just from Accrington but also Burnley, Chorley and Blackburn.

diets and inadequate housing. There were also keen recruits from the upper classes with five 'Public School Battalions' consisting of public schoolboys and university graduates.

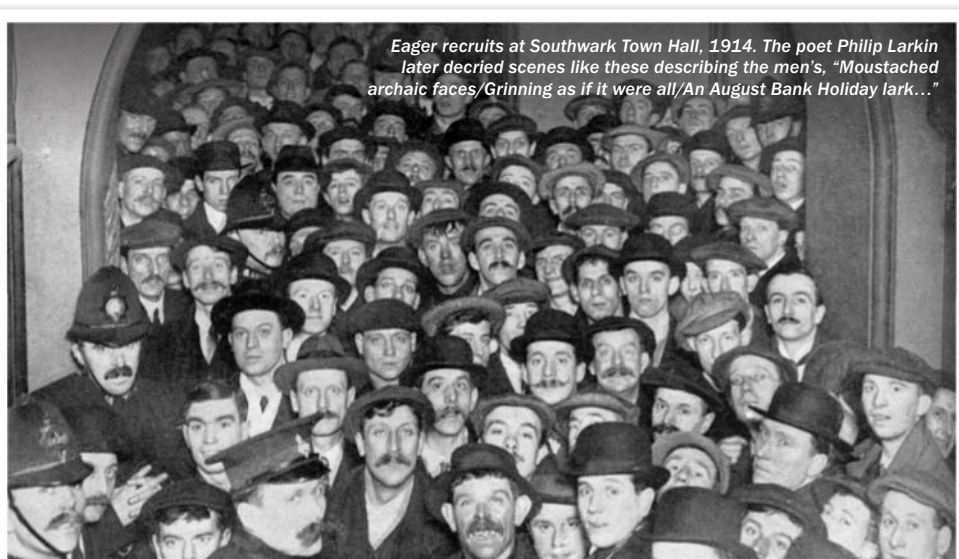
The enthusiasm of the industrial areas for the Pals Battalions was reflected in the speed and numbers of recruitment. Communities would compete to attract the greatest amount of new recruits. A battalion required 1,000 men to become operational but this number proved no obstacle. In Accrington, recruitment began on 14 September 1914 and 104 men were accepted in three hours. Within ten days, the Accrington Pals had reached full strength but this was slow compared with Sheffield which raised a whole battalion in two days. In Tyneside, there was a race between the Irish and Scottish communities to see who would be the first to raise a brigade – the Irish won.

The enthusiasm did not dim when news arrived about mounting casualties at the front. The bad news strengthened community resolve as volunteering became a duty, with social pressure influencing individuals to join. There was also a heavy propaganda campaign, which was aimed at coercing potential volunteers with the most famous example being the 'Your Country Needs You!' poster depicting Lord Kitchener pointing accusingly at the viewer. Such was the success of this and other placards that an Asquith lady of the early 20th century remarked, "If Kitchener was not a great man, he was, at least, a great poster."

Kitchener had done his job too well and the influx of volunteers meant the army could not process them all at the same time and some battalions had to be temporarily administered by magistrates. They were well trained, but it was often done with outdated equipment under the supervision of elderly officers or non-commissioned officers. Much of what the Pals learned was more appropriate for the colonial wars of the 19th century than a global conflict, so the new recruits training took until 1915-16.

The first three 'New Army' divisions (around 35,000 men) landed in France in May 1915. Reinforcements were desperately needed to reinforce the BEF, but many regulars had reservations about the potential performance of the Pals (or 'Kitchener's Mob' as they were nicknamed). British graffiti was often found with variants of the slogan, 'Lost or Stolen-Kitchener's Army-£5 Reward to Finder'.

Some of the 'Mob' were sceptical, including the future author and playwright JB Priestley who had volunteered in September 1914. He likened his battalion in the Duke of Wellington's



Eager recruits at Southwark Town Hall, 1914. The poet Philip Larkin later decried scenes like these describing the men's, "Moustached archaic faces/Grinning as if it were all/An August Bank Holiday lark..."

Regiment to, "A kind of brave rabble." This scepticism was well founded. Thanks to the hasty recruitment process, British society was thrown together in a military melting pot and were led by men of vastly differing ages. Henry Webber was a 67 year-old officer in the 7th South Lancashire Regiment, whereas Reginald Battersby, a Second Lieutenant in the 11th East Lancashire Regiment, was only 15.

For most in these battalions, their first action would be the Somme offensive, and its disastrous first day. An eight-day barrage had failed to destroy the deeply entrenched German positions and the British commanders, who were concerned about maintaining discipline in the new recruits, instructed the soldiers to walk in formation when the attack began at 7.30am. Unfortunately, this made them easy targets for the emerging German machine gunners and they were cut down in their thousands.

The Pals Battalions took huge casualties; many units recorded grim statistics on 1 July. The Tyneside Brigades suffered terribly, with the Scots enduring 2,400 casualties and the Irish 2,100. Most were killed within the first hour of battle. Both the Grimsby Chums and the Sheffield City Battalion lost around half their men. The Leeds Pals lost 750 out of 900 men.

Many of the Pals' casualties occurred when battalions of the 94th Brigade tried to capture the hilltop fortress of Serre. Units that led the attack included the Accrington Pals and Sheffield City Battalion and were supported by the Barnsley Pals, but they were marching towards the experienced 169th (8th Baden)

Infantry Regiment. Even before the attack the Pals arrived in shell-damaged British trenches and were pounded by enemy artillery before daylight broke. At Zero Hour the leading waves were torn by machine-gun and rifle fire.

Some of the Accrington and Sheffield Pals got through to the German frontline but the attack was in vain. Brigadier Rees recorded, "The result of the shells, shrapnel, machine-gun and rifle fire was such that hardly any of our men reached the German front trench. The lines which advanced in such admirable order, melted away under fire; yet not a man wavered, broke the ranks or attempted to go back. I have never seen such a magnificent display of gallantry, discipline and determination." 584 out of 720 Accrington Pals became casualties.

The first day saw the death of the Pals Battalions, but news of their destruction was slow to reach Britain. Relatives often only discovered the fate of their loved ones when letters reached the families of the dead. The casualty lists did not reach Grimsby until 10 July and rumours gripped panicked communities. In Accrington, the brother of one volunteer recalled a scene of grief that would have been replicated across Britain, "I remember when the news came through that the Pals had been wiped out. I don't think there was a street that didn't have their blinds drawn, and the bell at Christ Church tolled all day."

After the Somme campaign was done, the Pals Battalions survived in name only. Enthusiasm decreased and newly introduced conscripts replaced the volunteers. When WWII began conscription was immediately implemented. The wasteful death of the Pals on 1 July 1916 left a sad legacy. As one surviving Pal put it, "Two years in the making. Ten minutes in the destroying. That was our history."

"RELATIVES OFTEN ONLY DISCOVERED THE FATE OF THEIR LOVED ONES WHEN LETTERS REACHED THE FAMILIES OF THE DEAD"

A support company of the Tyneside Irish advance opposite La Boisselle on 1 July 1916. The brigade would suffer 2,100 casualties that day

Images: Alamy

BATTLEFIELD ARTEFACTS

WORDS PETER DOYLE



Writer, historian and archaeologist Peter Doyle presents some incredible artefacts that survived the battlefield

LIVERPOOL PALS BADGE

This battalion was born on the initiative of Lord Derby, who introduced the notion that men of the 'commercial classes' might wish to serve their country in a battalion of their comrades. Lord Derby took a personal interest in his 'pals', issuing to each one a silver badge bearing his arms. Edward Cole of Bootle wore this one; his brother Stanley was killed on the Somme on 30 July 1916, 'Liverpool's blackest day'.

BARBED WIRE

This has become as much a metaphor for the suffering of World War I as trenches and gas. This twisted, rusty sample is German, and came from Gommecourt, the scene of an ill-fated diversionary attack by the British 56th and 46th Divisions on 1 July 1916. The attack left over 2,000 men dead, five times that suffered by the German defenders – the barbed wire played its part.



TANK MASK

The tank, a British invention of 1915, was designed to cross trenches of at least 2.6 metres wide, and was first deployed in the latter stages of the Somme. They were hot, crowded and dangerous at the best of times, so crews were issued with leather helmets to protect their cranium. Chain mail masks protected their faces and eyes from shards of metal caused by bullet strikes on the machine's body.

SHELL SHARDS

For trench destruction, as well as for demolishing dugouts and other shelters, high-explosive shells were needed. Such shells delivered a huge explosive force, while the exploded shell wall created a high-velocity shower of shell splinters, like these, over 12-inches long, from the Ypres Salient. With the Germans occupying deep dugouts on the Somme, such high explosives were much needed – though less common than the shrapnel shell.



TYNESIDE SCOTTISH CAP

This cap belonged to Second Lieutenant Gilbert Watt Sandeman of the 1st Tyneside Scottish; on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, the Tyneside Scots were opposite the fortified village of La Boisselle. Completely in the open, the advancing Tynesiders were caught in a deadly crossfire. The 1st Tyneside Scottish lost 584 men: Sandeman was one of the fortunate ones.



Peter Doyle's best-selling book, *The First World War in 100 Objects* (The History Press) appears in paperback edition later this year.



Images: Peter Doyle



A British soldier surveys the battlefield near the corpse of a German soldier



A DEAD BOCHE (EXTRACT)
ROBERT GRAVES
Written: July 1916

...propped against a shattered trunk,
In a great mess of things unclean,
Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stunk
With clothes and face a sodden green...

After leave, Robert Graves returned to France with the new rank of a captain at the end of June 1916. He arrived on the Somme battlefields following the bloody, five-day battle to capture Mametz Wood, which was the largest wooded area across the whole front. Graves' battalion was stationed near the site, surrounded by the dead, a few days before the planned attack on High Wood, which sat a couple of miles away. The charge began in the evening of 15 July and the wood was finally captured by the 47th Division on 15 September, after a series of failed attempts. As the Royal Welch Fusiliers moved up the reserve line on 19 July, Graves was severely injured after being hit in the chest with exploding bomb fragments.

THE WELSH DIVISION STORMS MAMETZ WOOD

7-12 JULY 1916

Set among the dense trees in the Albert sector, this fierce five-day clash came to define Wales's role in the campaign and the war

Although the first day of the campaign was meant to be the breakthrough that would help end the war, it turned into an apocalyptic nightmare. Into this bloodletting came 20,000 men of the 38th Welsh Division who were assembled on the front line near Mametz Wood, a forested area that would soon become a new killing ground.

It was located in the Albert sector of the battlefield, positioned between the German first and second lines around Mametz, Fricourt and Bazentin le Petit Wood. It was the largest wood that the British and Germans would fight over in the whole battle and its expanse covered 220 acres, a mile in width and length, with trees that were between 30-45 feet high. The fighting

around the wood was incorporated within the general battle for Albert but it was considered strategically important, especially for attacking the German second line in the area. It was vital that the wood be taken before the next stage of the battle could begin, but any attacking army would have to move down a slope before advancing uphill in the open to reach the trees.

When the Welsh Division moved up they were ordered to prepare to capture Mametz Wood on 5 July, but the odds were not in their favour. The division (which was mainly Welsh but also contained English, Scottish and Canadian troops) was made up of largely untested volunteers who would be confronting the elite Lehr Infantry Regiment of Prussian Guards –

highly trained and entrenched professionals equipped with mortars and machine guns.

The attack on the wood began at 8.30am on 7 July but the advance stalled 200-300 yards short of the trees and another attack at 11am also failed. The war poet Siegfried Sassoon was an officer in the 2nd Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers and described the ominous approach to the wood as, "looming on the opposite slope... a dense wood of old trees and undergrowth... a menacing wall of gloom." A third attack was ordered but it was called off thanks to wet conditions and cut telephone lines. The division ended the day having gained no ground but suffered 180 fatalities.

The first real test of the division's volunteers had been a complete failure. The British commander-in-chief, Douglas Haig, blamed the division for not advancing "with determination to attack". He replaced Major General Ivor Philipps with Herbert Watts as the divisional commander and ordered a new attack to begin at 4.15am on 10 July. The Welsh felt

"THE WELSH FELT THEY WERE BEING VIEWED BADLY BECAUSE OF THE INITIAL ATTACKS AND BECAME DETERMINED TO TAKE MAMETZ WOOD, BUT THEY ALSO KNEW MANY WOULD DIE IN THE ATTEMPT"

*"The Welsh at Mametz Wood" by Christopher Williams.
This painting was commissioned by the Welsh Secretary of State for War, David Lloyd George, and was studied from a soldier's eyewitness account*



they were being viewed badly because of the initial attacks and became determined to take Mametz Wood, even though they also knew many would die in the attempt. Lieutenant Colonel Hayes said to officers of the Swansea Pals, “We are going to take that wood, but we shall lose our battalion.”

As predicted the attack on 10 July was extremely violent. By mid-morning the Welsh had gained a solid foothold in the wood but throughout the day they were hampered by poor visibility, thick undergrowth, well-established machine guns and accurate sniper fire. This made progress extremely difficult and the Welsh fought for ground yard by yard. Captain Emlyn Davies described the terrible events that unfolded, “Gory scenes met our gaze. Mangled corpses in khaki and in field-grey, lumps of torn flesh half way up the tree trunks; a South Wales Borderer and a German locked in their deadliest embraces – they had simultaneously bayoneted each other.” Captain Llewelyn Griffiths was similarly horrified, “There were worse sights than corpses. Limbs and mutilated trunks, here and there a detached head, forming splashes of red against the green leaves.” Griffiths’ brother, Watcyn, was killed in the battle.

By daybreak of 11 July, the Welsh Division was scattered throughout Mametz Wood with many battalions severely depleted. A decision was made to for the Welsh to be withdrawn from the wood and be replaced by the 21st Division. Their replacements cleared Mametz Wood by midday on 12 July and encountered little resistance. It was a sad irony that the Welsh could not stay to see their hard-fought victory completed and the casualties that they

had suffered were enormous. 3,993 men from the Welsh Division were recorded as dead, missing or wounded, and the Swansea Pals lost more than half their battalion in one day with 452 casualties. Sassoon felt that the eventual success was not worth it and called the battle, “a disastrous muddle with troops stampeding

under machine-gun fire”. He was right to feel cynical because within weeks the Germans recaptured the wood but the 38th Division’s heroism was not forgotten. One officer remembered the attack of the Welsh as, “one of the most magnificent sights of the war,” as men were seen, “advancing without hesitation.”

A German lookout post at Mametz Wood. The fighting devastated the local landscape



Images: Alamy

“A CERTAIN CURE FOR LUST OF BLOOD”

THE BLOODLETING AT MAMETZ WOOD MARKED THE WELSH PSYCHE – LARGELY HELPED BY TORTURED WAR POETRY BY THOSE WHO FOUGHT

Although the fighting at Mametz Wood formed only a small part of the wider battle, it came to be well-remembered thanks to the heroism of the Welsh Division and the eyewitness accounts of war poets and artists. The disproportionate amount of memoirs and poems that were written about the forested killing ground sealed its fame for posterity. Robert Graves described the wood after the battle, “It was full of dead Prussian Guards, big men, and dead Royal Welch Fusiliers and South Wales Borderers, little men. Not a single tree in the wood remained unbroken.” He later reworked this description into his 1917 poem, *Dead Boche*, which included the lines, “Today I found in Mametz Wood/A certain cure for lust of blood.”

Siegfried Sassoon was another famous poet who was becoming tired of war by 1916. He wrote afterwards, “Up in the trenches opposite Mametz it seemed as though winter would last forever. I had made my mind up to die, because in the circumstances there didn’t seem to be anything else to be done.” Two days before the battle started he wrote a poem called *At Carnoy*, which described the despairing trepidation before the attack, “Tomorrow we must go/To take some cursed Wood... O world God made!” Literature was not just confined to officers like Graves and Sassoon but also wounded privates like David Jones who in his poem, *In Parenthesis*, described a shell-burst as, “A consummation of all burstings out; all sudden up-renderings and livings-through... all barrier-breaking-all-unmaking”.

These literary works, despite being written mostly by Englishmen, contributed to Mametz Wood becoming the defining moment of WWI for the Welsh, in the same way that Thiepval was for Ulster and Gallipoli was for the Anzacs: a sense of national courage in the face of mortal peril.

Below: The Welsh Memorial Dragon at Mametz Wood. The battle was Wales’s defining experience during World War I





Heroes of the Victoria Cross

TOM EDWIN ADLAM

During the Somme campaign, a schoolteacher from Salisbury inspired his men to victory against insurmountable odds

WORDS PETER WOLFGANG PRICE

By the 27 September 1916, the Somme campaign had been raging for almost two months and British soldiers in France were preparing themselves for an attack on the village of Thiepval and its formidable fortifications. Lieutenant-Colonel Tom Adlam, at that time a second lieutenant, almost single handedly turned the tide of battle in his fearless storming of the German trenches. Adlam, a man with a self-confessed nervous disposition, seems to play down his role in the attack, which saw British forces establish a foothold on the heavily defended German line.

Tom Edwin Adlam was born on 21 October 1893 at Waterloo Gardens, Salisbury. After leaving school he trained as a teacher and found himself at Brook Street Council School, Basingstoke. As well as teaching, Adlam joined the Territorial Army in 1912 where he worked his way up to the rank of sergeant. Here, he received basic army training and, when war broke out in 1914, he was pressed into service with the rank of second lieutenant. No additional officer training was available but Adlam was able to make up for much of what he didn't receive. In his eyes, a sergeant would need the knowledge of a platoon commander and so learnt any other information he needed on the job.

Adlam did receive some specialist training as he was commissioned as a bombing officer. This differed from the modern use of the word and was used to describe men trained rigorously in the use of grenades, both Allied and enemy. From mechanisms and tactics, including attacking and clearing trench systems, bombing officers were taught to wield

grenades with great proficiency. These men would stand out with the red grenade badge on their right arms. This training would turn out to be invaluable as Adlam described the five-inch Mills bombs as having enough weight to wrench an arm out of its socket if thrown incorrectly. His cricket days would be of great help refining his technique of using either arm to throw a bomb upward of 40 feet.

After this training was complete he was assigned to 7th Battalion, Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire regiment, 54th Brigade, 18th Division, a Pals Battalion with fellow teachers making up his squad mates and their commanding officer being the headmaster of the school. While they were preparing for deployment in England, the rest of the 7th Battalion had been ordered forward on the first day of the Somme and suffered heavy losses in the assault. They were one of the few British battalions that entered and cleared the German trenches assigned to them in contrast to many other units that beaten back. Several weeks later the battalion would again suffer massive losses in the deadly assault on Trones Wood.



These casualties were so high that reinforcements had to be shipped over from Britain and this is where Adlam and the rest entered the field. Sceptical of some peoples' view of the war being over by Christmas, Adlam nevertheless put his conservative estimate at the conflict lasting one year. After the horrific loss of life on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, this estimate fast became a dream for both Adlam and his fellow teachers on the fields of Flanders.

Life on the Western Front was, at times, bad or as Adlam put it, "bloody awful". Even with inside billets and access to a change of clothes, one of the perks of being an officer, the conditions were still woeful, but Adlam remarked that the men managed to stay remarkably cheerful despite this. Adlam, and another young man named Cartwright, turned out to be the lucky ones of the regiment as they were never troubled with lice or any other insects, even joking with each other as other men stripped to their waist trying to rid themselves of the vermin.

Adlam almost didn't participate in the battle as, after receiving news of his mother's passing, the army offered leave to attend the funeral. An adjutant officer talked him out of leaving, stating that the ceremony would be over by the time he got back and that he couldn't do any good back home, so it was best to stay on the front. Taking the officer's advice, Adlam stayed in France. This innocuous decision would pave the way for one of the finest military feats in the battalion's history.

Left: Members of the 7th Battalion pass through a French village on their way to the front

Adlam was commissioned as a second lieutenant during WWI and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel

..... ●

“It is rare proof that the discipline, determination and morale of the men was of a very high order. In my opinion the ensuing operations, successful though they were, in no way compares with those of the 26/27th”

7th Battalion's commanding officer

..... ●



The 7th would be placed at the forefront of the attack on the village of Thiepval and a mighty defensive fortification called Schwaben Redoubt, known as the 'Pope's nose'. It was their task to storm these positions and wrestle it from German hands. This was no easy task, seeing as the redoubt was fortified with well dug trench systems, complex tangles of barbed wire and multiple machine-gun nests. The 36th Ulster and 49th West Yorkshire Divisions had both failed to secure this position during the initial stages of the battle and now it fell to Adlam's unit to make yet another attempt. If this position could be taken it would dominate the German frontline from North to South in the surrounding area.

The morning of the 26 September, Adlam led his men towards the front lines through harassing German artillery fire, with British guns answering in kind. Once in position, battalion officers formed a plan of attack and a night assault on the village of Thiepval was decided. This attack was instigated to straighten up the British line, with C and D companies creeping forward in the predawn gloom. Visibility was abysmal and the men soon became lost in the darkness. As Adlam and C Company neared their positions the advantage had fled, as morning light started to creep over the village. With attack orders still standing C Company charged into the fray and almost immediately found themselves pinned down in shell holes, with machine-gun fire rattling over their heads.

At this point in the line the British were only 100 yards from the German trenches. Seizing the initiative, Adlam began dashing around the battlefield, gathering men together for an assault. He gave an account of the engagement in an interview for the Imperial War Museum, "I thought, 'We've got to get this trench somehow...'. So I went crawling along from shell hole to shell hole, 'til I came to the officer in charge of the next platoon. He said 'I'm going to wait until it gets dark then crawl back, we

“This minor operation came under very heavy machine-gun and rifle fire. Second Lieutenant Adlam, realising that time was all-important, rushed from shell-hole to shell-hole under heavy fire, collecting men for a sudden rush, and for this purpose also collected many enemy grenades.”

An extract of his Victoria Cross citation found in the London Gazette, dated 25 November 1916

can't go forward.' I said, 'Well, I think I can!' He shook hands with me solemnly and said 'Goodbye, old man!'. I said, 'Don't be such a damn fool, I'll get back alright, I'm quite sure I can get back.'"

Worry didn't seem to enter Adlam's mind as he gathered men for the assault. Utilising his training he instructed each man to pull the pin on his grenade, run two or three yards and hurl the explosive at the German trench. This opening salvo created a break in the German lines that the British then rushed into. Initially, each man carried two Mills bombs, but after these were exhausted Adlam, had the men gather up German explosives, which were lying around by the bag full in the trench. Adlam had observed German grenades being thrown at British troops usually had a delay of two to three seconds before exploding, somewhat reducing their effectiveness. After carrying out a rather dangerous experiment, Adlam found holding the grenade for a longer period of time before throwing it reduced the delay and resulted in a more effective blast. He

would later reflect that the Germans must have been rather unnerved after seeing their own explosives raining down on them.

Freshly supplied, the 7th Bedford rushed through the trench flushing out any Germans they found. The machine-gun position proved a stauncher obstacle and, with bullets whizzing over his head, Adlam subjected the nest to unrelenting barrage of explosives. With the position neutralised the Germans began falling back. Seeing the enemy wavering, the British soldiers gave a great shout and as one charged through the remaining trench system, routing the Germans completely. Tom Adlam, wounded in the leg during combat, and his handful of men had taken a heavily defended objective that had already repulsed several attempts.

Below: The Mills bomb was the first modern fragmentation grenade used by the British Army



German prisoners are escorted to the British lines during the battle



Stretcher bearers carrying a wounded man over the top of a trench in the village of Thiepval



After the initial fighting had subsided, Adlam was instrumental in securing the position, tirelessly setting up defensive positions and flushing out the last pockets of German resistance. His actions saw the over 100 Germans being taken prisoner. A and B Companies were sent in to secure these new acquired positions as Adlam and his men prepared for the assault on the redoubt itself.

The next attack would come a day later, the fighting was much like the previous engagement with grenades being utilised to effectively clear the trenches of enemies. At this point Adlam's right arm had been wounded, so he immediately switched to his left, finding that his aim was just as deadly. After an officer bandaged his wound he was ordered back from the frontline, he had done more than enough.

His last action was to personally escort 12 prisoners he had captured back with him. These two days of frenzied fighting saw the British secure a significant foothold in the redoubt, with the rest of the position being fully secured the next month.

Congratulatory messages and accolades were pouring in from all echelons of command, including Field Marshall Haig. Dozens of gallantry awards were issued with the most prestigious, the Victoria Cross, being awarded to Tom Adlam for his unwavering bravery and leadership. Adlam would hear of his Victoria Cross recommendation second-hand after a

“On the following day he again displayed courage of the highest order, and, though again wounded and unable to throw bombs, he continued to lead his men. His magnificent example of valour, coupled with the skilful handling of the situation, produced far-reaching results”

An extract of his Victoria Cross citation found in the London Gazette, dated 25 November 1916

night of celebration back in England. In true modest fashion, Adlam downplayed his courage and leadership as an oddity, (“Of course, I was abnormal at the time: I didn't feel that there was any danger at all at that moment.”) but was presented with 12 telegrams full of congratulations from family and friends.

Confused, he telegraphed his father asking why he had received them. His father responded that the press had been asking his family for pictures of Adlam to use in their articles. Strangely, nobody had thought to tell Adlam himself that his name was put forward for the

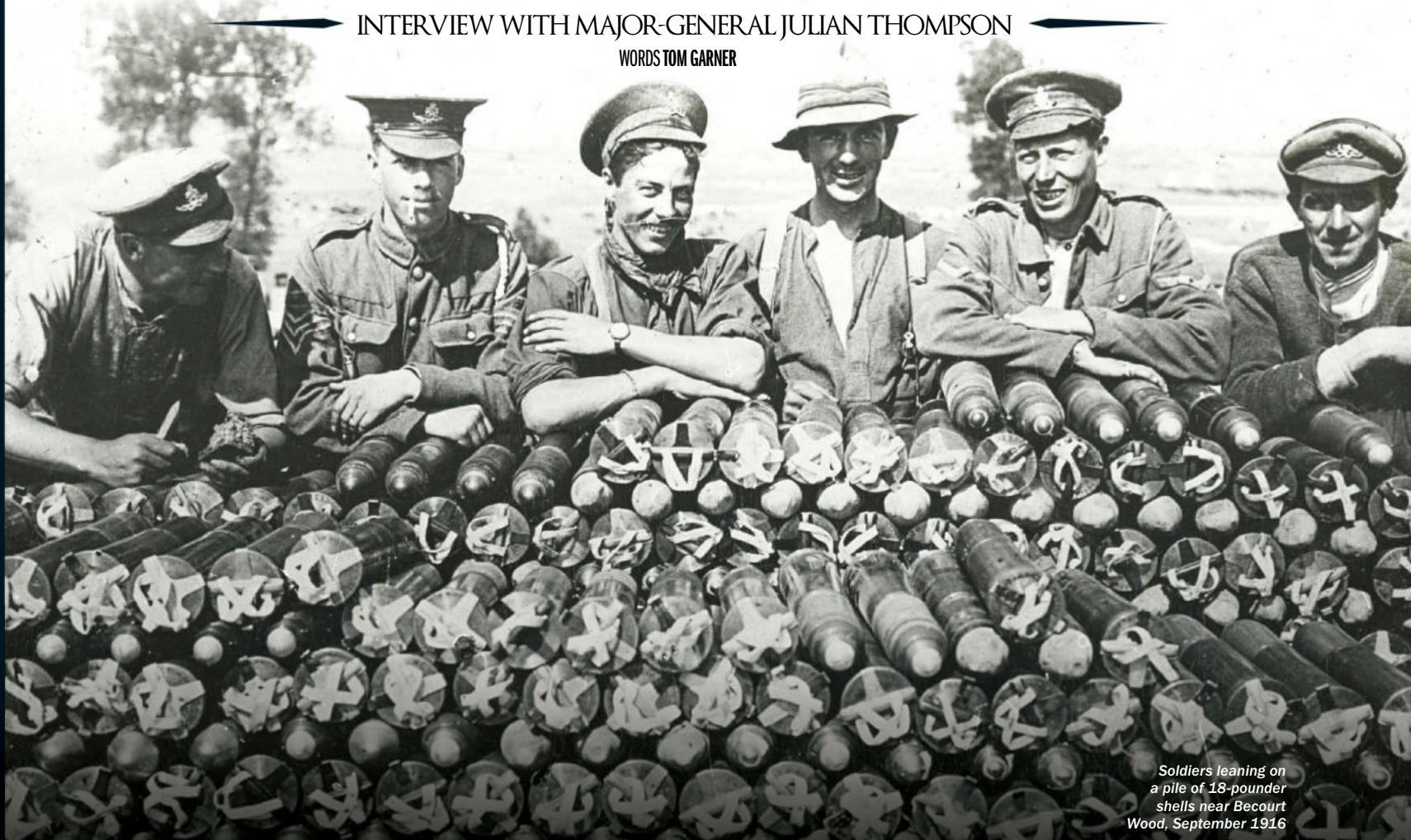
award. After some downtime in England, Adlam was ready for transfer to Singapore, a trip that never came as armistice was declared in 1918.

Following the end of the war, Tom Adlam became headmaster of the village school in Blackmoor, Hampshire where he raised four children with his wife, Ivy. When conflict erupted again in 1939, Adlam was again called to service and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1944. After a long and full life, on 28 May 1975, Tom Adlam passed away during a family holiday, aged 81. He is buried in St Matthew's Churchyard, Blackmoor.

INSIDE THE 'CRUCIBLE OF THE BRITISH ARMY'

INTERVIEW WITH MAJOR-GENERAL JULIAN THOMPSON

WORDS TOM GARNER



Soldiers leaning on a pile of 18-pounder shells near Becourt Wood, September 1916



The battles in the Somme region raged for four and a half months and became a killing ground for both sides. However, this was also a time when the British learned new methods for fighting trench

warfare, which would come in useful later on in the conflict. Here, Julian Thompson, author of *The Somme & Verdun. 1916 Remembered* explains how the battle was a baptism of fire for both the common soldiers and the high commands alike and why the Somme broke the back of the German Army and contributed to its ultimate defeat.

HOW DID THE FIGHTING AT VERDUN IMPACT UPON THE ALLIED OFFENSIVE ON THE SOMME?

Hugely, in the sense that the French were originally going to provide 40 divisions for the Somme offensive. In fact, [in the end] they provided five divisions in their initial attacks so they had far fewer soldiers than they would otherwise have had.

In a sense Verdun impacts upon the Somme because the French were very keen that the battle took place. The Somme battle took place in order to relieve pressure on Verdun.

HOW EFFECTIVE WERE THE BRITISH AND FRENCH COMMANDERS AT CO-OPERATING WITH EACH OTHER?

One problem that they had was that they didn't have an overall [leader] who was commanding them both and there was no structure, as we would now understand it, for having a joint command. I think they did as well as they could in the circumstances bearing in mind that communications were rudimentary. There were no battlefield radios; there were just telephone lines and people being sent in motorcars or on horseback. I think they did quite well in the circumstances and they got better at it as the war progressed.

You also wouldn't want an overlap of Allied units otherwise you would have had even more chaos than there was before. What were needed were boundaries between divisions and corps so that everyone had their own 'patch'.

What you didn't want was people firing into each other's areas and attacking each other by mistake in a classic 'blue on blue' situation.

HOW IMPORTANT WAS THE CONTRIBUTION OF BRITISH IMPERIAL TROOPS?

They were very important. The Australians and New Zealanders came into the battle having come across from the Middle East where they'd been engaged at Gallipoli.

The Indians were also important. The Indian infantry were no longer there, as they'd been sent off to Mesopotamia, but the Indian cavalry played a very important role at the Somme in the only cavalry charge of the battle at Bazentin le Petit. The Indian 9th Cavalry brigade consisted of two Indian cavalry regiments and one British cavalry regiment; they did as well as they could in the circumstances. The trouble was that they were launched too late and in, probably, too few numbers.

The South Africans were also very significant in Delville Wood because in the line that they were fighting, there was a kink and that exposed the British flank to an attack by

the Germans. Delville Wood was important particularly with the way they hung on after they'd been given a very hard time trying to take the wood. They were able to hold onto their bit against a heavy German attack.

AUSTRALIAN CASUALTIES WERE HEAVY AT POZIÈRES, BUT WHY IS THIS BATTLE SO ILL-REMEMBERED IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING IT?

For the Australians, Gallipoli gets prominence because it's the first time that the Australians are committed to a battle of that size in their history, so it's the signature battle. At Pozières, they were fighting on the Western Front for the first time and they had a lot to learn on how to fight there but that's no criticism of them at all.

They did have very heavy casualties but they became one of the crack outfits as part of the British Army later in the war; they were put in where things were starting to go wrong to put them right. This tends to overlay their performance at Pozières. In a sense, there's a natural inclination to try and forget about things that didn't go terribly well and play to the things that did, which is a perfectly natural thing to do.

Everybody, including the imperial troops, learned a huge amount from the Somme. Somebody once called it, "The crucible of the British Army," because huge numbers of lessons were learned about the use of artillery, the use of fire and movement and tactics on the battlefield, which meant that everybody got much better and more expert. The Australians made a speciality of it and they were among the best troops on the Western Front.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE BATTLE CONTRIBUTE TO THE EMERGENCE OF TACTICAL AERIAL WARFARE?

It became the starting point for huge improvements in techniques for example in air photography, which became a very important part of what the airmen on both sides tried to do. Reconnaissance was the key to finding out what the enemy was doing on the other side of the hill and a lot of the battles that were fought in the air between the fighters were to protect the reconnaissance aircraft of your own side. If you were carrying out reconnaissance over the German lines, the Germans would come along and try and shoot you down so you had to have fighters to protect your reconnaissance aircraft.

Many of the dogfights were not just because chaps thought they'd like to go and have a fight in the sky. What they were trying to do was gain air superiority over that sector of the battlefield so that reconnaissance aircraft could have a free run at taking photos of the other side.

HOW DID BRITISH ARTILLERY FIRE IMPROVE AT THE SOMME?

The British artillery improved hugely in a number of ways. Firstly, they got better trained because when Britain entered the war in 1914 there weren't enough guns to equip the newly raised artillery regiments. They trained on logs and some artillery regiments fired their first practice live rounds when they got to France in 1916, so they obviously weren't very good at it.

Secondly, there was the problem of the quality of shells. Some of the shells that were produced in a great hurry were not up to



Above: A British flare gun that belonged to Sergeant E Gray of the 7th Battalion, Yorkshire Regiment. Gray died of his wounds attacking Fricourt on 1 July

standard and either didn't go off or went off too early. Better shells were produced which were able to cut the wire because, instead of digging into the ground and then going off with a bang, which didn't have any effect on the wire at all, they produced fuses that were so sensitive that they went off the minute they touched anything and that helped to cut the wire. All of this came after the Somme.

Thirdly, the gunners began to realise that you couldn't just aim your gun by looking down the sights and firing directly, it all had to be by what was known as 'indirect fire'. This meant that the fire had to be observed by someone else using a telephone line correcting it and all the techniques for that progressed as the war progressed and it got even better using by air photography. The gunners eventually, not in but as a result of the Somme battle, were able to bring down fire without doing any pre-ranging, which gives away the fact that you're going to fire on a target. They were able to call down the fire quite suddenly for a few minutes before an attack without the enemy realising that an attack was coming because it was all done so quickly.



British infantry go over the top at the Battle of Morval on 25 September 1916. Morval was a partial success in the later stages of the Somme offensive

Additionally, just before the war started a bright young gunner was talking to a group of artillerymen at a lecture and said, "One day we're going to have to predict the weather." They all laughed but actually he was quite right. Weather prediction was important to work out what the air pressure was going to be because that has an effect on a shell. This far higher degree of technology and techniques all grew out of the experience on the Somme. It was all borne out of practice and experience.

WHAT IMPACT DID THE BATTLE HAVE ON GERMANY'S FIGHTING CAPABILITIES? WAS IT REALLY 'THE MUDDY GRAVE OF THE GERMAN FIELD ARMY'?

The losses for the Germans were so high even though they were defending. These losses added to the huge casualties that they had endured at Verdun and it had a severe impact on the German Army... I would say yes the Somme was the muddy grave of the German Field Army but also so was Verdun – the two combined were a shocking blow.

What is remarkable about the German Army is that they went on fighting right until the end; they were a formidable enemy. If you didn't pay attention to them you got a nasty surprise, they were never people that you treated lightly. They were a serious enemy because they were so well trained and their morale remained high right until the very last few weeks of the war. They still went on fighting but one of the effects that the Somme had was that they withdrew to the Hindenburg Line as a result of their experiences and this was done deliberately to make life more difficult for the Allies because they had a shorter line to defend and therefore they could have more troops defending it.

The Allies were forced to go over ground that had been churned up and cut to pieces with serious booby traps between them and the new line. The Hindenburg Line was a very strong [defence] and endured until the last months of the war.

TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE RESIGNATION OF GENERAL ERICH VON FALKENHAYN INFLUENCE THE COURSE OF THE BATTLE?

What it did was brought forward the partnership of Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff. Hindenburg was moved from the Eastern Front to take over from Falkenhayn with Ludendorff as his 'brains' as the chief of staff. These two were a very bright pair who had a tremendous impact on the battle because they were good leaders and they'd think straight.

Ludendorff, in particular, was extremely clever so the effect was to produce commanders who were even better than Falkenhayn. Both of them were quite shocked at the conditions on the Western Front, having fought on the Eastern Front where there was mobility and large use of cavalry and very mobile battles over vast areas in Russia, like in World War II. They suddenly found themselves in what was effectively siege warfare, which was a shock to begin with but what it did mean was that you had a far better pair in charge than Falkenhayn.

CAN THE BATTLE BE VIEWED AS A GERMAN SUCCESS IN LIGHT OF THE FACT THAT

THE ALLIES WERE NOT ABLE TO BREAK THROUGH THE DEFENCES AND DID NOT ACHIEVE THE DECISIVE VICTORY?

It was a tactical stalemate but it was actually a strategic success for the Allies because it persuaded the Germans that the only way they were going to win the war was unrestricted submarine warfare and that a way of knocking the British out of the war was to starve them to death. However, the unrestricted submarine warfare brought the Americans into the war in 1917 so they were forced to make a strategic error as a result of the Somme.

The British did not 'win' at the Somme in that sense but the Germans suddenly realised that, if they went on having battles like this, the British might win and so they had to knock them out of the war. For the Germans it was a psychological blow and it forced them to do something that was strategically wrong from their point of view, which brings a very powerful bunch of people, [namely] the Americans, into the war against them.

WHAT DID THE GERMANS LEARN FROM THE SOMME FOR THEIR LATER CAMPAIGNS IN 1917-18?

What they learnt was that the best way of doing an attack was using stormtroopers. They trained them very successfully and they were highly [effective] in the German offensive of March 1918, taking the British and the French totally by surprise by their tactics. The problem they had was, without battlefield radios, once the stormtroopers had taken their objectives and were 'storming away', they couldn't tell the men behind them of their results and so their successes couldn't be capitalised on to the fullest extent. Nonetheless, it certainly made them change their tactics, which of course the Allies were not slow to copy.

COULD THE BRITISH HAVE REALISTICALLY CAPITALISED ON THEIR SUBSTANTIAL GAINS AT MORVAL AND THIEPVAL RIDGE?

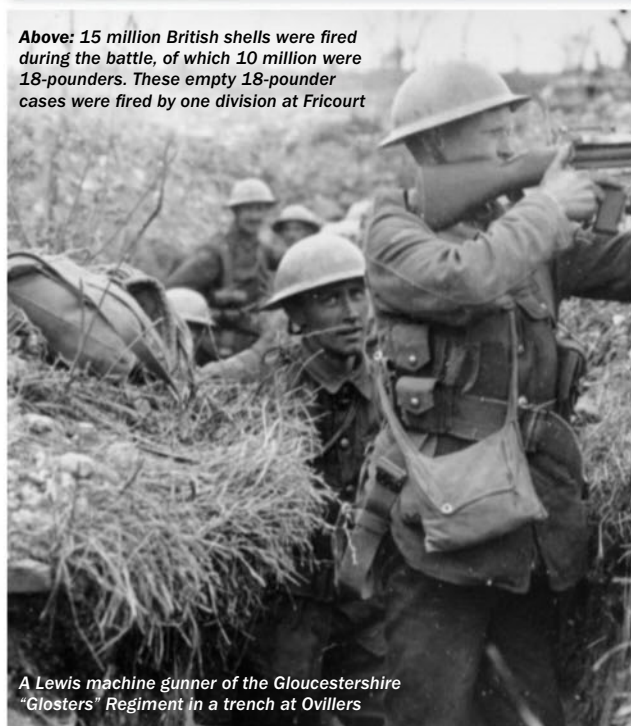
What completely brings the battle to a halt is the weather, with heavy mud and problems with getting guns forward. Although there were some gains, the problems which always bedevilled both sides in this war was when you'd made a gain of say half a mile or a mile you then had to bring up your guns in order to go further. Guns were towed through the mud by horses and the whole process was very slow. The whole effort 'bogs down' into this business of trying to get forward and capitalise on success.

Ultimately, the weather has a huge impact on what you're trying to do bearing in mind that there aren't many track vehicles. Most of the wheeled vehicles have got solid tyres and are no good across country and therefore you can't even drive off the road. Even the roads themselves are reduced to muddy morasses. Everything just grinds to a halt. The British got around that, not at the Somme, but later because they had learned the lesson a couple of years later, by having tanks, which carried guns forward. It was an empty tank with nothing on it – rather like a truck with tracks – and they brought the guns forward on that. They moved forward on very broken ground by using vehicles with tracks. The British learned those things from the Somme.

Dead German bodies in a ruined dugout. One officer described the Somme as, "The muddy grave of the German Field Army"



Above: 15 million British shells were fired during the battle, of which 10 million were 18-pounders. These empty 18-pounder cases were fired by one division at Fricourt



A Lewis machine gunner of the Gloucestershire "Glosters" Regiment in a trench at Ovillers



WHY DID THE FIGHT AROUND BEAUMONT-HAMEL AND OTHER SIMILAR OBJECTIVES LAST FROM THE FIRST DAY UNTIL THE END OF THE BATTLE?

They were key places where the defences were very strong and were regarded as vital ground. Once you've got this objective you are well poised to go ahead and try and take the next bit of vital ground. The fighting was always hugely difficult because of the nature of the ground on the Somme, which is chalk.

This means you can dig very good positions and defences in chalk are good at holding up against artillery and you can dig deep dugouts. The Germans held all the key ground and the Allies had to take out ground that was held very strongly. This was the problem; you were going to certain places where if you took them you could then move on and perhaps crack open the line. That's the reason that these places come up again and again.

WAS THE END OF THE OFFENSIVE IN NOVEMBER AN ADMISSION OF DEFEAT?

I don't think it's a sign of an admission of defeat saying, "We've got to have a pause and think again." Haig did not, in fact, want to attack on the Somme; the French forced him to. Remember that the French are the senior partners because they're providing most of the troops and Britain has to uphold a key alliance.

Haig actually wanted to attack in the Passchendaele area and everyone nowadays thinks, "Passchendaele would have been awful," but then the defences were not nearly as strong. Haig had a brilliant idea, which was to attack at Passchendaele and at the same time the Royal Navy would carry out a landing on the Belgian coast, which would join up with him.

Had he been able to attack in Flanders in 1916, there was every chance that it would have succeeded but one of the penalties of a coalition in warfare is that you have to take notice of what your coalition partner asks you to do. Huge pressure was put on Haig to attack at a place that he didn't want to and the Somme was not a very clever place to attack. They were attacking a bulge and so all they were doing was pushing back and they got themselves into a position where they had to attack frontally in a situation that was not to their advantage.

This is the problem about coalition warfare; you may not be able to do exactly what you want to do. The French were on home turf and could appeal to the politicians saying, "Haig is not being cooperative," etc, and the politicians probably would have sacked him and put in someone who did what the French asked.

IN HINDSIGHT, WHAT DOES THE SOMME SAY ABOUT DOUGLAS HAIG'S ABILITY AS A MILITARY COMMANDER?

I don't believe in the 'lions led by donkeys' business. Haig was actually a very intelligent man. He was a rather forbidding personality but he did go and visit the troops every day. If you look at some of the entries in his diaries, where he talks about people that he's met, he often says, "I've been talking to someone today and he's not feeling well and been around too long. He needs a rest". He actually comes across as a rather humane man but he's got this reputation for not being humane. He did as well as anybody

"HAIG DID NOT IN FACT WANT TO ATTACK ON THE SOMME; THE FRENCH FORCED HIM TO"

else and he was on a learning curve, like every other general, including the Germans. After all, Falkenhayn committed the German Army at Verdun to a battle of attrition on the basis that he'd 'bleed the French Army white', whereas he ended up bleeding his own army white too.

They were all coping with something that was completely strange and new to them, which was industrial warfare on a huge scale. The greatest problem that all sides suffered from was not having battlefield radios. This may sound like a pretty trivial thing but if when they committed troops to a battle the only ways of sending communications was by sending a pigeon, or a man who takes hours to get back, or setting up a telephone line which were then cut by shellfire. You sometimes didn't know what was going on for hours or even days, so how do you then alter it and say, "That's not going terribly well, lets do something slightly different which may succeed."

By the time they worked out what to do the picture had changed again and so what they were going to do was out of date. Communications were absolutely vital.

Haig is also always criticised for living in chateaus, but if you've got a huge headquarters, what are you going to do, build a tented camp? You go into what is available. All the higher commanders lived in houses with stables and places to set up their staff and somewhere that was on the end of a railway line so that you could move things around. I think Haig gets a bad press partly because he died before David Lloyd George did and therefore he didn't get his memoirs in before Lloyd George. History is written by the survivors.

DESPITE THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND ANOTHER WORLD WAR IN BETWEEN, WHY DOES THE SOMME STILL EXERT SUCH AN EMOTIONAL PULL ON THE IMAGINATION?

It's the first time that the British had to face casualties on this scale in their history because up until then they tended to take the fight when they wanted to such as in Marlborough and Wellington's campaigns and also because sea power was how they exerted their influence. They often paid other people to do the fighting or they were part of a bigger organisation when they were fighting on land but here for the first time is a national army full of volunteers in the first really big battle for Kitchener's armies before conscription comes in.

You've got to remember, that by spring 1915, the French had suffered as many casualties as the British were going to suffer in the whole war. Everybody else had been taking the pain beforehand and it was bound to be a huge shock. 'Iconic' is not the right word but it is a national memory and it tends to concentrate on the first day but it actually went on for five months. These are battles that go on for months, not days and there were two more Somme battles that happened in 1918 that fluctuated backwards and forwards.



British soldiers stand in the ruins of Beaumont-Hamel's church in November 1916. The settlement had been an objective for 1 July



I HAVE A RENDEZVOUS WITH DEATH

ALAN SEEGER

Written: c. 1916

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,
When Spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple-blossoms fill the air –
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land
And close my eyes and quench my breath –
It may be I shall pass him still.
I have a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When Spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow-flowers appear.

God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear...
But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When Spring trips north again this year,
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

An American poet, Alan Seeger, was serving with the French Foreign Legion, in the south of the Somme, when he faithfully kept his appointment with death on 4 July 1916. Seeger's battalion was part of the first wave to take the village of Belloy-en-Santerre and, although the attack was a successful one, he, alongside many others, was lost to gunfire. The order to charge came at 4pm and Seeger was last seen running forwards, bayonet in hand, towards the right of the targeted village, unaware of the hidden German machine guns along the Belloy-Estrées road. Later, the French Foreign Legion were commended by the French Sixth Army for their victorious actions of the day, in capturing the village from the enemy and taking around 750 German prisoners.



*British infantry rush to the front
of their trench line to assault a
German position*

© Getty

FIRST CHARGE OF THE TANK

15-22 SEPTEMBER 1916

INTERVIEW WITH DAN SNOW



The First World War witnessed a host of technological innovations, but one of the most dramatic made debuted on 15 September 1916. It was on this day, in the middle of the campaign, that the British effectively began armoured warfare with the introduction of the Mark I Tank. Here, TV historian Dan Snow explains the tanks' impact on the battle as well as their crews, while discussing his latest work with the Royal British Legion to commemorate the centenary.

WHAT PROCESS DID THE ORIGINAL TANKS GO THROUGH BEFORE THEY WERE BATTLE-READY IN 1916?

The most interesting thing about tanks in 1916 is that [they] went from an idea in the autumn of 1914 of trying to utilise Britain's advantage in mechanical armoured objects, albeit ones that floated on the water, to somehow using them on land as 'land-ships'. The fact that it went from the drawing board onto the battlefield in two years is extraordinary.

The story of the tank belies the idea that Britain was traditional and didn't want to innovate and that the generals were really conservative. Actually, this technology [was] being raced to the front arguably too fast, because there were huge numbers of tank ideas that were tried out. 'Little Willie' was successfully tried out in the autumn of 1915 so it [was] a year from a vaguely working prototype to deployment on the battlefield...

TANKS WERE FIRST USED AT FLERS-COURCELETTE IN SEPTEMBER 1916, BUT WHAT IMPACT DID THEY HAVE ON THE BATTLEFIELD AT THAT TIME?

They didn't 'break-through' but they did 'break-in' to German positions. Many of them broke

WORDS TOM GARNER

down on the way up and many didn't even cross the British front line. Lots were disabled and they were very slow. Although they could traverse No Man's Land, German guns could hit them if the gunners were able to see them. So they weren't a wonder weapon but there were one or two tanks that would get out into a bit of space and it was more the tantalising prospect that was raised by the success of these individual tanks that inspired the BEF to order more.

In many quarters the British public today don't want to hear good news about Douglas Haig, they don't want to believe he was anything but a butcher. He actually stuck his neck out [to order] a large number of tanks for use in 1917 and it was those tanks that formed the backbone of the attack at Cambrai in late 1917, which is the first stunning success of armoured vehicles in its history. It probably would not have been possible without their first deployment at Flers-Courcelette. The tanks did just enough there to justify a big order.

WWI was probably the most innovative period in the history of the British Armed Forces and the high commands were reaching for anything that could possibly break this stalemate. They were desperately trying to find alternatives to frontal assaults against fixed infantry positions protected by barbed wire. I think the story of the tank is part of the wider story of innovation in 1916 and on the Western Front.

WHAT WAS THE REACTION AMONG THE GERMAN TROOPS WHEN THEY SAW THE TANKS COMING?

I think it came as a complete surprise, certainly to the frontline infantrymen. Some sources have said that there was an important morale factor in that it spooked the enemy. I've talked to a German historian recently and he's said that the tanks didn't unduly freak out the

Tanks first entered combat on the Somme in time for a renewal of the offensive. However, there were great communication problems between the tank crews and the infantry fighting outside

Germans. There's the myth about these steel monsters that just made the enemy run away, which isn't quite true. I think it was probably patchy in places. If you were in a machine gun nest and there was a tank rumbling towards you you'd probably run away but not because there was some mythical element to the tank.

A new weapon of this kind would probably have boosted British morale, but I don't think it led to total terror and collapse on the German side as some people have traditionally suggested. The tanks were going so slowly and deliberately that if you had to abandon your position, you would have had plenty of warning to [do so] at your leisure.

HOW WERE THE TANKS ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH ONE ANOTHER EFFECTIVELY, AS WELL AS WITH THE TROOPS OUTSIDE?

This is the problem, there's no radio contact. At this point there was no way of communicating. However, very rapidly they put a bell on the back of the tank so that the infantrymen could go up and ring it. Isn't that absurd that you have to go up and ring a bell? It's very amateurish but the trouble is you've got a steel box with a big engine roaring inside and you're locked in for protection. Suddenly communication is a big issue...

Armour-infantry co-operation was extremely difficult and it was not until the Battle of Amiens when they'd spent two years trying to perfect it, that communication got better.

The problem with World War I is that everything is brand new. Aircraft had only been in the sky for a decade, tanks had just burst onto the scene and there was no real way of meshing them all together.

WHAT LESSONS DID TANK DEVELOPERS TAKE FROM THE PERFORMANCE OF THE MACHINES ON THE BATTLEFIELD?

Serviceability was a big issue as was crew endurance. How do you make these tanks more comfortable so you don't asphyxiate the crews, burn them and basically hospitalise them after a day inside them? A big issue was moving them into a position where they are able to attack without alerting the enemy. The engines are very loud so how do you concentrate them in their jumping-off points without alerting the enemy? There are many lessons to be learned. Then, of course, you've got a problem when tanks get too isolated so if they do enjoy success and penetrate into German defences you actually end up isolated and not helping the infantry advance.

What is born on the Somme, and continues in armoured warfare right up until the Gulf War in 1991 and beyond, is a debate about how tanks are designed to thrust deep into enemy lines in order to sow chaos and confusion in line with quite conservative goals involving supporting the infantry. You see the very beginnings of that long-running debate in the autumn of 1916.

WHAT WERE CONDITIONS LIKE INSIDE THE TANKS? WERE THE DRIVERS WELL TRAINED BEFORE GOING INTO COMBAT?

Obviously they weren't as well trained as they would be later in the war, it was all pretty rushed. The inside of the tanks was absolutely brutal. If you go into one of those tanks there's no separation between the crew compartment and the engine. The engine is really hot and blasting out appalling fumes and there were real problems with burns. There's also not much in the way of suspension so you're being thrown around inside a lot.

There was also 'blue-on-blue' sometimes. Officers would have to stand up and give visual



A tank near Thiepval in September 1916. Mark I's were very slow, noisy and extremely prone to breaking down

cues so that there wasn't friendly fire. They had to take incoming fire as well. Even machine guns with rounds that were not armour-piercing could make life pretty miserable inside a tank – you're attracting enemy fire and it's hammering on the outside of the tank. It's a brutal, claustrophobic place to be.

HAIG WANTED 150 TANKS FOR THE BATTLE BUT ONLY 50 WERE EVENTUALLY AVAILABLE. WOULD THIS FULL FORCE OF TANKS HAVE CHANGED THE COURSE OF THE BATTLE MUCH?

I don't think at that point in their history tanks were a breakthrough weapon. I think the fundamental problem was fuel, range, speed and they were not the strategic weapon they would become in WWII and other conflicts. What's so remarkable about 1918 is that for the first time you get these light tanks, which are almost like armoured cars, that actually break through German positions and they're

in the 'green fields beyond'. They actually do things like surprise a German corps commander while he's having his breakfast and it makes them an extraordinary weapon.

However, I think the Mark I tanks were too limited to be really effective in 1916 but it, obviously, didn't hurt at the same time and I think they would have proved themselves even more. Because of their unreliability, 150 might have perhaps been a bigger embarrassment to the British. The key thing about the tank is that Haig ordered 1,000 of them after the battle, which was a brave decision. 1,000 tanks is asking a lot of an industry struggling under the pressure of the war, but a seed was laid that began of one of the most prominent features of 20th century warfare. 20 years after their introduction [at] the Somme tanks are thrusting deep into Russia and encircling literally millions of Soviet troops. It's an amazing journey.

THE SOMME 100 APP

SNOW HAS BEEN WORKING WITH THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION TO CREATE A FREE MOBILE AND TABLET APP, BRINGING TO LIFE KEY MOMENTS FROM THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

"With the Somme anniversary coming up this summer there's going to be a thirst for information and a thirst for a background that will allow people to enjoy and get involved with this summer's activities. With the Royal British Legion we've hopefully provided a real timeline with battle maps, accounts, sources, pictures,

video etc that people can then build on in their own time and get involved... It feels like an exciting and versatile project and I hope it's a beginning because I'd love to do things like this in the future."

The Somme 100 App is available for free via the App Store and Google Play. For more information, visit: www.britishlegion.org.uk

The Somme 100 App features Dan Snow explaining key moments of the battle along with academic answers from Professor Sir Hew Strachan



Images: Alamy, Getty, Royal British Legion, Rex Features

*Soldiers of a
Württemberg
infantry unit in a
well-made trench
at the Somme,
Summer 1916*

WACHT AN DER SOMME:

— THE GERMAN EXPERIENCE —

WORDS ROBIN SCHÄFER

Across the wilderness of No Man's Land, German defenders weathered waves of French and British attacks, determined to hold their positions



As part for a few French attacks in early 1915, the German army on the Somme had enjoyed a relatively quiet time before the launch of the Allied offensive in July. The trench systems were deep and well-made and bristled with barbed wire, machine-gun positions, fortified strongpoints and bomb-proof dugouts. Having occupied the

same areas since 1914, the German defenders had developed an intimate knowledge of the terrain, which allowed them to stage a highly effective defence.

The German armies on the Western Front were highly skilled and excellently equipped for defensive warfare. Many of the field-grey veterans had survived the bitter fighting at Ypres and had repelled Allied onslaughts at Neuve Chapelle, Loos and Champagne. These

men now formed the backbone of a resolute and formidable army – an army that was high in morale and more than prepared to resist everything the British and French armies could throw at them.

Prelude

By June 1916, most German officers, including Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, were well aware that the Allies were planning a large-

scale offensive north and south of the Somme. Their views were dismissed by Erich von Falkenhayn, Chief of the German General Staff, who was convinced that the Allied attack was to target Rupprecht's 6th Army around the Scarpe river, near Vimy Ridge and Arras. Yet despite von Falkenhayn's view, a number of British prisoners, taken in raids between 24-27 June, reported that a major attack was going to take place along the Somme front, a report backed up by the opening of the British preliminary bombardment on 24 June.

It lasted for seven days, and saw 1,537 artillery pieces fire over 1.5 million shells of all calibres into the German positions. It was a bombardment of hitherto unseen scope and vehemence. On the receiving end, in their bunkers, dugouts, and underground redoubts the German defenders suffered – and waited.

The relentless artillery bombardment levelled trenches, caved in defensive positions and turned survival above ground into a matter of luck; nevertheless, casualties inflicted were lower than both the attackers and defenders had expected. But for the Germans sheltering underground a week of continuous Trommelfeuer (drumfire) was a psychological ordeal. The defenders were desperate to get out of their dugouts and felt utterly helpless, vulnerable and lost. They waited; there was little to do but write letters to their loved ones at home.

Triumph and catastrophe on 1 July 1916

In the early morning hours of 1 July the artillery bombardment still raged when, at 7.20am, the sound of a massive explosion broke the continuous roll of drumfire. The British had blown a 40,000-pound explosive charge under the Hawthorne Redoubt near Beaumont-Hamel,

directly under the positions held by the 119th Reserve-Infantry Regiment. The effect was as spectacular as the decision to detonate the charge before the planned Zero Hour was disastrous. The explosion heralded the imminent British attack across the front lines and the soldiers of the German 26th and 52nd Reserve Divisions reacted immediately. Now was the time to fight back, and movements that the defenders had practiced continually for months were now set in motion.

As the Allied barrage finally lifted, the defenders were fully prepared and waiting to receive the British attack. Emerging from their dugouts, the moment had come to resist, and the fate of the Pals Battalions at Serre, of the 29th Division at Beaumont-Hamel and of 4th Division at Redan Ridge had been sealed. The German defenders set about stopping the 'race to the parapet' being run by the British. By the end of the day, the British 4th Army had suffered more than 57,000 casualties, with over 19,240 of them dead. Between Gommecourt and Montauban four German divisions had taken on 12 British ones and had dealt them a terrible blow. Across the front, the German 2nd Army had suffered about 5,000 to 6,000 killed, wounded or taken prisoner.

Materialschlacht

In the following 140 days, the Allies continued to deliver blow after blow. Learning from 1 July, they employed more methodical approaches in an attempt to wear their enemy down. Focus was switched to taking key terrain features, instead of trying to punch through the German lines. To do this they employed new artillery and offensive tactics – innovations that slowly took their toll on the defenders – but interestingly it was the Germans themselves who, by following strict

"It is clear that the enemy is planning a major offensive. Our patrols have snatched some Englishmen from their trenches and these prisoners reported that the enemy is planning to attack after a 4- to 5-day artillery barrage on a front 48 kilometres wide. These preparations were to end in a 12-hour drumfire of high-explosive shells and gas. We will greet him accordingly."

**Lieutenant Wilhelm Schmeel
Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr 15**

"Dear parents, I hope you are still well. I am still all right. By now the damned shooting has been going on for 5 days! The effect though is relatively small. Best wishes to you all! Wilhelm. If God wills it, we'll see each other again."

**Gefreiter Wilhelm Karl Scheuermann
Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr 121**

"The thunder of the guns and the sound of detonating shells is ear-deafening. It is pounding through the night like the surf of a storm-beaten sea. We can only sit and wait. It is hell. Please Lord, let them come!"

**Lieutenant Wilhelm Schmeel
Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr 15**

"THE EFFECT WAS AS SPECTACULAR AS THE DECISION TO DETONATE THE CHARGE BEFORE THE PLANNED ZERO HOUR WAS DISASTROUS"

*Machine-gun position at the Somme,
October 1916*



code to 'hold at all costs' and to re-take any lost terrain at any price, did most to help the British to achieve that goal.

"The first principle in positional warfare must be not to yield one foot of ground, and should it be lost, to retake it by immediate counter-attack, even to the use of the last man," wrote Captain Wilfrid Miles.

Enforcing this doctrine, even without any tactical necessity, sealed the fate of thousands of experienced German troops, who were killed or wounded in desperate attempts to hold and take ground of little or no importance. Reinforcements were thrown into the line to suffer catastrophic losses for virtually no purpose. Divisional strengths diminished at an alarming rate until November, with a total of 90 German divisions fed into the Knochenmühle, the bone grinder, of the Somme. On average a division could hope to last three weeks before having to be withdrawn for refit.

In the relentless storm of artillery fire, and the continuous flow of attacks and counterattacks in the raging battles over the shell-torn wasteland, names such as Thiepval, Teufelswald, Hochwald, Guillemont and Pozières became forever scorched into the memories of both German and British consciences.



Grave markers
in the Fricourt
German Cemetery

Whenever you see a fighter who was
there at the Somme, bow down low to
the ground, because you simply do
not know what he did for you!

Lieutenant Otto Ahrends
Infanterie-Regiment Nr 76

The pressure applied by the Allies superiority in manpower and material forced German commanders and units to make use of new defensive tactics and command structures. Superior Allied firepower levelled and destroyed German trench lines and dugouts such that many soldiers felt that being out in open terrain was actually safer. Even though they made command and control more difficult, the so called Trichterstellungen, or shell-crater positions, were soon seen as an effective means to counter Allied superiority. These gave room for a more flexible, different kind of defensive doctrine. When subjected to shellfire, troops would leave their shell holes to fall back to other Trichterstellungen towards the rear, and could quickly reoccupy their foremost lines when enemy troops started their advance.

From this, the Germans began to embrace a new kind of defence-in-depth. Front sizes were drastically reduced, while units were given more room for manoeuvre. When deployed, a German division would have two regiments in the front line, with the third held back as a reserve. Individual regiments were broken down and deployed in-depth as combat (Kampf), immediate reserve (Bereitschafts) and reserve (Ruhe) battalions. Weakened forward lines

German field-graves on the
battlefield near Guillemont



LEGACY

HOW THE GERMAN TROOPS RETAINED THEIR POWERFUL IMAGE AFTER SUFFERING A LARGE LOSS OF PERSONNEL

Following their army's withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line in 1917, the 'Schlacht an der Somme' slowly became a portent of war for the Germans. Thousands of their soldiers, who had been killed and buried in that area since 1914, had to be left behind in 'enemy territory' without any noteworthy and lasting memorial to commemorate them. Their fallen had sacrificed their lives during the 'Watch on the Somme', a 'heroic' battle in defence of the Fatherland. Holding out in the tremendous volume of shell fire, against a numerically superior and better supplied enemy, turned the battle into a topos of the German experience of war on the Western Front. The 'wall of iron and fire' had not been broken – it had become the equivalent of the French maxim 'Ils ne passeront pas' – They shall not pass!

There, in northern France, comrades of the 28th Reserve-Division sank into their graves in their thousands. Sons of Baden, our Heimat – torn to pieces by shell fire, their remains ploughed into the earth of valleys and hills. Others rest in war cemeteries and only a few of those who received the noble sacrament of death, found their final resting place in the soil of German Heimat. In reverence we bow our heads before the greatness of the sacrifice. Somme – a sacred name for all those that survived.

Sergeant Karl Eisler, Reserve-Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr 29

“EVEN THOUGH NOT OFFICIALLY AUTHORISED, GERMAN DIVISIONS BEGAN TO FORM PERMANENT STURM COMPANIES”

made the ability to launch rapid counterattacks even more important.

To achieve this, companies were broken down into four platoons instead of the usual three. The fourth platoon was made up of the most experienced troops, those able to act and operate on their own initiative and without orders. Even though not officially authorised, German divisions began to form permanent Sturm companies and battalions. These elite all-arms units were made up from the most reliable, fittest and most experienced men, and were tasked with the most challenging and difficult offensive missions.

In recent years, it has often been stated that the British gained more as a direct result of the battle and that the collective experience of it had been a necessary step in the development of Kitchener's citizen army. It is often forgotten, though, that lessons learned at the Somme, also allowed the Germans to repel and counter Allied attacks in 1916, and prepared them well for the coming battles of 1917-18.

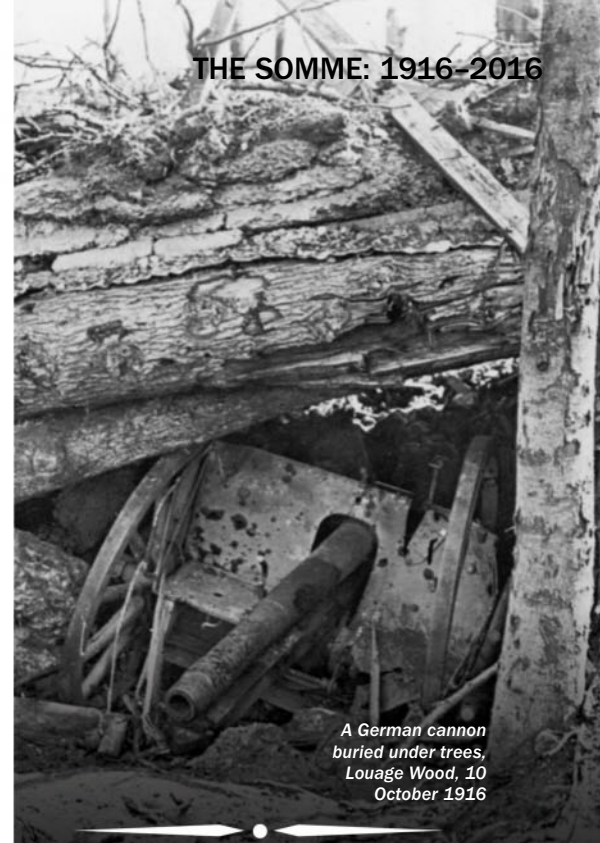
On the Somme, the German Army had lost more than 430,000 men – a terrible loss of manpower that it would never be able to replace. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that the German Army emerged from the battles of 1916 as an even more powerful foe than it had been before it. In this, the Allied offensive failed to achieve what it had set out to do.

The German lines and German morale remained unbroken. Though losses had been severe, there were still enough reserves to send a number of divisions to the Eastern Front, where they effectively defeated the Romanians, who had joined the war against Germany in August 1916.

The Somme had indeed been, as Captain von Hentig said, “a muddy field-grave of the German Army.” Yet it was also the birth place of a new German Army – one that would be able to continue the fight effectively against all odds for another two years and which still managed to fight the British Army to the brink of the defeat in the Spring of 1918.



Machine-gun platoon of the 125th Infantry Regiment in August 1916



A German cannon buried under trees, Louage Wood, 10 October 1916

The Somme. Everything we had anticipated, now stretches before us in all its awe inspiring, shocking and almost fairy-tale-like beauty. As far as the eyes could see, in a wide arc from the left to the right.

The eyes start analysing, trying to link the apparitions of light to corresponding detonations. A huge cone of fire, which is accompanied by a terrible cacophony of exploding shells of the heaviest calibres, seems to be pointing directly at us and a sea of flame is spouting from it. It is impossible to tell from which side the projectiles have been fired. Everywhere, absolutely everywhere, and in quick succession there are flashes of light and detonations in all tone pitches imaginable. Whole salvos detonate, crash down and rebound.

Like a gigantic natural spectacle: Mountains crashing down, deadly avalanches, erupting volcanoes. Mixed into it there is the rattle of machine guns and the cones of searchlights, which are probing the terrain for prey.

In its regularity and inexorability, the battlefield has the appearance of a huge bone grinder, its massive pestles grinding into a huge mortar ruthlessly squashing the human bodies contained in it. The terrible sight, and the immense roar accompanying it, appeared to be too much for some of the men to bear. Interestingly, it seemed to affect those who appeared to be strongest, the most cheerful ones, those who seemed to have the strongest nerves first. Some of them passed out with a shock of the nerves and had to be sent to the rear.

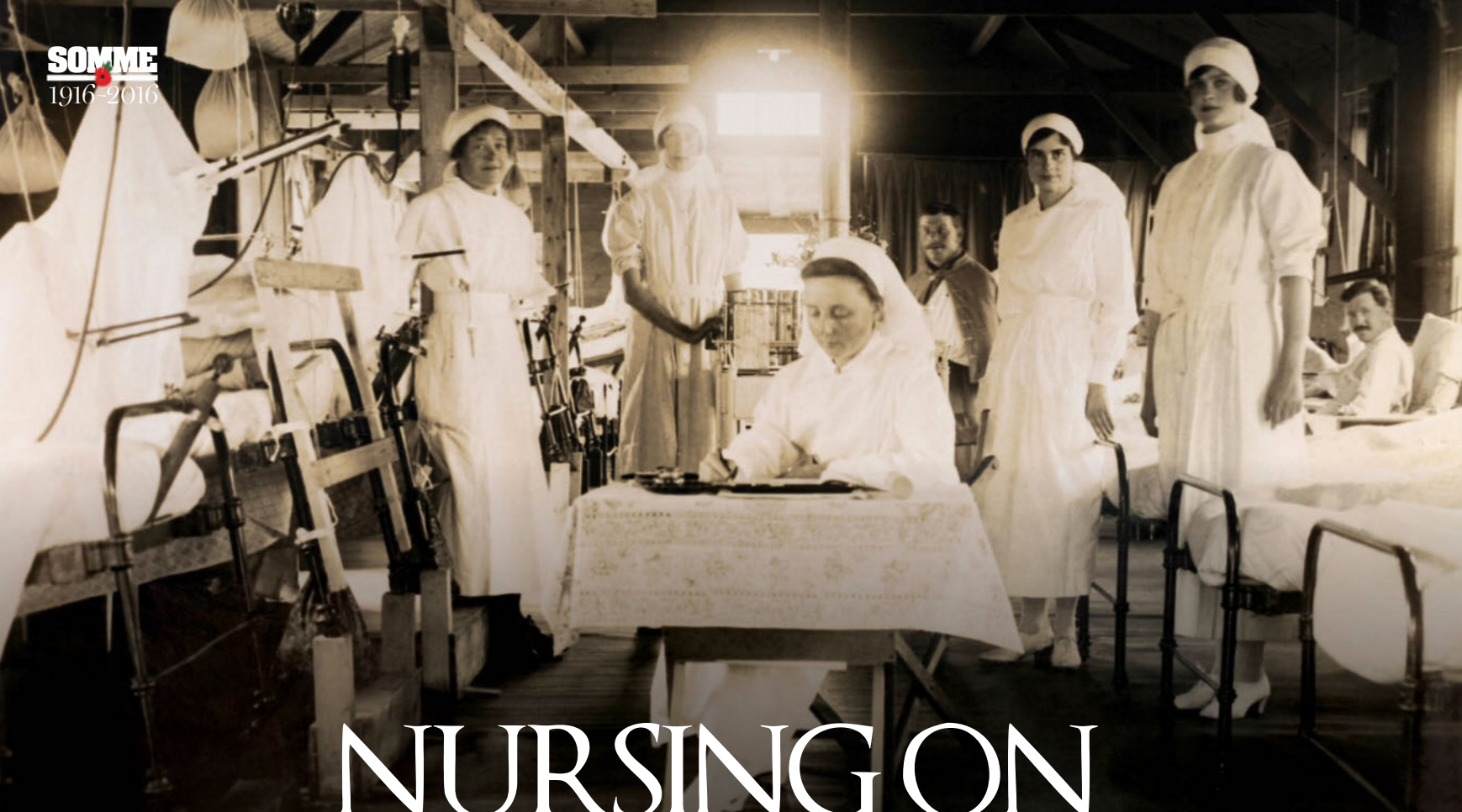
Our men mingle with comrades who have only just returned from the front line. They tell them of the horrors of battle, of trenches that don't deserve to be called by that name anymore, of having to survive in the hellish inferno of shell fire – shell fire of a kind that can't be described by words. They speak of collapsing dugouts, of a rain of shards, shrapnel and splinters, of horrible and utter carnage and the wailing and screaming of wounded and dying comrades (...) Here on the Somme everything happens on a grand scale, even the dying!

**Lieutenant Kurt Trautner
Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr 102**

We are right in the middle of a wasteland of shell craters. Everywhere around me the men are taking shelter in holes and craters and I can only wonder how many of them are going to see the next day. For the last 90 days the enemy has tried to force a breakthrough, but we did not let him pass. He may push us back, but he will never break us! If Tommy thinks he has eliminated all signs of life, then he will come and attack. And if he does, we will be ready for him.

**Lieutenant Werner Seebeck
Infanterie-Regiment Nr 24**

**Lieutenant Kurt Trautner,
Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr 102**



Nursing staff prepare for the visit from King George V at a British base hospital on the Western Front, circa 1916

NURSING ON THE FRONTLINE

AN INTERVIEW WITH PENNY STARNS



At the outbreak of the war, scores of sisters, nurses, doctors, as well as thousands of civilian volunteers, committed to treating the thousands of wounded that returned from the trenches. The horrors coming home from the battlefields, however, were worse than anyone had imagined, and volunteers were faced with the terrifying effects, both mental and physical, of the frontline. In her new book, *Sisters Of The Somme*, writer and historian Penny Starns chronicles the little-known history of these nurses and doctors who served tirelessly at hospitals both in Britain and France.

HOW DID HOSPITALS PREPARE AND RE-ORGANISE SPECIFICALLY FOR THE OFFENSIVE CASUALTIES?

In preparation for the Somme offensive, extensive medical plans were drawn up by the director general of Army Medical Services in the field, General Arthur Sloggett. Field ambulances were divided into two sections, one very close to the front line, and the other slightly behind. These sections had the ability to rapidly amalgamate if necessary, thus providing large, advanced casualty clearing stations. Sloggett had also ensured that there were greater numbers of medical staff on the frontline than during previous battles. Makeshift operating theatres were moved to forward areas, and anaesthetists, orthopaedic and neurological

surgeons were placed on call. In addition, three fully equipped hospital trains were placed on standby, in order to transport seriously wounded men from casualty clearing stations to base hospitals. Further hospital trains were available if necessary.

Immediately prior to the Somme offensive base hospitals evacuated as many patients as possible to make beds available for incoming wounded. Staff leave was cancelled, and the quartermaster of each hospital made sure that cupboards contained adequate stocks of medical supplies such as wound irrigation fluids, dressings and bandages.

Base hospitals also sent small parties of nursing sisters down the line to help at dressing stations. These medical arrangements reflected a high degree of thoroughness and efficiency. They worked well in theory and General Sloggett had no reason to doubt the efficacy of his plans. They turned out, however, to be woefully inadequate.

WHAT WERE THE MOST COMMON INJURIES TREATED AT THE FRONTLINE HOSPITALS AND WHICH WERE THE MORE SEVERE SEEN AT ST JOHN'S?

The nature of injuries changed throughout the war in response to changing methods of warfare. Shell shock became increasingly common, and, from 1915 onwards, gas victims were commonplace. Compound fractures of the femur were among the most common injuries sustained by soldiers on the frontline. Between

1914 and 1916, approximately 80 per cent of all soldiers with this injury died. Bone ends simply rubbed together causing heavy blood loss and shock.

Often victims' legs were brutally amputated with kit knives on the battlefield by fellow soldiers attempting to save their lives. In 1916, however, the Thomas Splint was introduced, which stabilised such fractures and reduced mortality rate from 80 per cent to less than 10 per cent. Along with a variety of fractures, gun-shot wounds were also commonplace and usually warranted admission to a base hospital. St John's, being the best equipped of base hospitals admitted the worst of battle casualties. Usually these soldiers had sustained multiple wounds...

St John's hospital was unique in many respects. For its time it was a state of the art hospital; the only one in the entire British Expeditionary Force to possess an electrocardiograph department. In addition, there was a modern laboratory and x-ray department. The hospital was almost entirely funded by voluntary contributions and underpinned by a strong Christian ethos. It also operated an efficient staff exchange system with the 130th (St John) Field Ambulance front line unit. The hospital's first commanding officer, Colonel James Clark, established the Etaples medical research society, and staff at St John's were at the forefront of medical research. During its lifespan the hospital admitted and treated 36,100 men.

THOUGH SHELL SHOCK WAS RECOGNISED DURING THE PERIOD, WAS THERE MUCH UNDERSTANDING OF THE MENTAL, NOT TO MENTION PHYSICAL, STRAIN ON VOLUNTARY AID DETACHMENT NURSES (VADs) AND SISTERS AT THE TIME?

One of the primary aims of commanding officers in charge of military hospitals was to keep all staff in robust mental and physical health. Furthermore, there were extensive measures put in place to achieve this aim. Nurses were given a list of guidelines for maintaining health upon their arrival on the Western Front. These included instructions about diet, cleanliness, sleep and exercise. Entitled 'a nurses duty to herself' the guidelines recommended that nurses should never skip meals because this lowered their resistance to infection. They were advised to sleep for at least eight hours and exercise in the fresh air during their periods of off-duty.

Once battle casualties began to arrive following the Somme offensive, however, all these guidelines were abandoned. Nurses worked until they dropped, skipped meals, and had no time to wash. Moreover, the only time they were in the fresh air was when they were making their way through a carpet of blood and khaki in the hospital grounds, attending to the wounded as they did so.

Most of the guidelines for nurses' health were concerned with physical wellbeing, but there was a recognition that mental stress might overcome some nurses. Certainly a number of rest centres were established for nurses who had been working under duress,

and these were constantly in use. The term 'burn out' was sometimes used to describe those who were already suffering or about to suffer from mental health issues.

Commanding officers were trained to spot signs of mental stress and take preventative action when possible. Weekly reports from St John's suggest that around 5 per cent of nurses suffered from 'burn out' or breakdown. Colonel Trimble noted in his report that: "Sister Gervive and VAD nurse Reny Taylor were taken into the sick sisters' home in Le Touquet. I am greatly afraid that the last named lady will have to be invalided to England as this is the second breakdown since she came to us a short time ago." Furthermore, when St John's was badly bombed on 31 May 1918, at least six nurses suffered seriously from what is now termed post-traumatic stress disorder.

WAS THE NURSING PROFESSION RADICALLY CHANGED BY THE EXPERIENCES OF WWI, AS IT HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN BY THE LESSONS OF THE CRIMEAN WAR?

Before 1914, nurses were politically divided. Some followed the stance of Florence Nightingale, who had argued that nursing was a vocation with status attached to individual hospitals, while others followed the assertion of Ethel Bedford-Fenwick, who maintained that nurses needed a national standard training leading to registration. Nightingale had insisted that nurses should not be tested as though they were engineers, while Bedford-Fenwick argued that nurses should be tested

thoroughly to ensure a national standard of care. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN), which was established in 1916, initially adopted Nightingale's views then later shifted in favour of registration.

In 1919, spurred on by the nation's poor health and the influenza pandemic, a Ministry of Health was established. In the same year, the Nurse Registration Act was passed. Nurses still failed to agree on professional direction, however, and the government formed a General Nursing Council (GNC). Registration for nursing entailed a three year training programme in an approved hospital training school, followed by written, practical and oral examinations. In theory the GNC could withdraw approval from inadequate nurse training schools but the need to staff hospitals relegated training to a secondary concern.

For nurses who had experienced the ravages of the Western Front political wrangling seemed futile. VADs were particularly hard done by. Returning from the frontline they discovered that their valuable wartime experience counted for nothing in the civilian world.

If they wanted to continue nursing they were expected to embark on a three year nurse registration course, just like all those who had no experience at all.

Consequently, most gave up on the idea of nursing. The Nurse Registration Act and the General Nursing Council did eventually ensure some standardisation in nurse training, but in their eagerness to protect nurse status thousands of young VADs were needlessly lost to the profession.





This bronze caribou monument was erected to honour the Canadian Newfoundland Regiment that was almost wiped out at Beaumont Hamel

BREAK OF DAY IN THE TRENCHES

ISAAC ROSENBERG

Written: *Summer 1916*

The darkness crumbles away.
It is the same old druid Time as ever,
Only a live thing leaps my hand,
A queer sardonic rat,
As I pull the parapet's poppy
To stick behind my ear.
Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew
Your cosmopolitan sympathies.
Now you have touched this English hand
You will do the same to a German
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
To cross the sleeping green between.
It seems you inwardly grin as you pass
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,
Less chanced than you for life,
Bonds to the whims of murder,
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,
The torn fields of France.
What do you see in our eyes
At the shrieking iron and flame
Hurled through still heavens?
What quaver – what heart aghast?
Poppies whose roots are in man's veins
Drop, and are ever dropping;
But mine in my ear is safe –
Just a little white with the dust.

Towards the end of August in 1916, Private Isaac Rosenberg joined his battalion at Calonne, as they began to make their way steadily south towards the Somme. He was in the 40th Division, which had been summoned to France as part of the planned offensive, and was there to replace other divisions who were moving forward on the frontline. The battalion marched for a few months, in bad and bitter weather, and were posted in trenches semi-weekly, losing men along the way. The 40th Division reached the trenches of Hébuterne, near Beaumont Hamel, around the middle of November and it stayed there for just over a week, marking both the end of the five-month campaign and Rosenberg's 26th birthday.

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FRANCE'S HERETIC WAR

WORDS ERICH B ANDERSON

What began as a holy war to end Cathar heresy, later became a conflict in which northern France would subjugate the south of the kingdom

On 22 July 1209 a huge crusader army was encamped outside the city of Béziers, in the Languedoc region of southern France. The crusaders demanded that the townspeople hand over 222 leading Cathar heretics within, or they would all be punished for harbouring the enemies of the Catholic Church. Not only did the citizens of Béziers defiantly refuse to betray their friends, neighbours and family members, but they even mocked the crusaders from the city walls.

The crusader camp was located on the opposite side of the only bridge that stood over

the Orb River adjacent to the city. Leaving the safety of their fortifications, citizens neared the bridge, shooting arrows, throwing stones and shouting insults. The crusaders closest to the attacks managed to chase them back to the city gate before it could be shut. The guards nearby left their posts on the walls to stop the besiegers from entering the city, but it was too late. The crusaders flooded Béziers, butchering anyone who attempted to stop them. When some crusaders asked Arnaud Amalric, the overall commander, how to distinguish between the Catholics and the Cathars, his response was

said to have been, "Kill them all! God will know his own." In the end, at least 7,000 were slain in the massacre that followed.

The Albigensian Crusade was the first holy war sanctioned by the pope and the Catholic Church against western Europeans. Although a part of the Kingdom of France, the southern inhabitants of the Languedoc region were independent. Not only did the magnates in the area refuse to acknowledge the authority of the church throughout their lands, but also the language and culture of the region was more similar to northern Spain, making their ties to

“THE ALBIGENSIAN CRUSADE WAS THE FIRST HOLY WAR SANCTIONED BY THE POPE AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AGAINST WESTERN EUROPEANS”

After the massacre at Béziers, the crusaders besieged the city of Carcassonne, another Cathar stronghold

the Kingdom of Aragon stronger. The division of power between the local aristocracy, clergy and wealthy burghers was an ideal environment for the Cathar 'heresy' to flourish.

Roots of heresy

It is unknown exactly when Catharism reached Languedoc, but what's certain is that it was firmly established in the region by the middle of the 12th century. By the 1170s, Albi had become the location of the first Cathar diocese, which is where the title Albigensian Crusade originated. The Cathars were highly influenced by dualism, which had spread to southern France from Eastern Europe and beyond.

According to the dualist theology of the Cathars, there were two separate gods, one

evil and one good. The benevolent god was the master of the spiritual realm, while the evil god was the overlord of the physical world. A major reason why there was so much animosity between the Cathars and Catholics was because the former group believed that the Church of Rome and its clergy were the main servants of the malicious god on Earth.

Prominent churchmen in Languedoc pleaded for the local Catholic nobility to root out the heresy in their lands, but the magnates of southern France refused. Eventually, Pope Innocent III began to send his legates to the region to preach against the heresy and warned of the dire consequences they would face if they supported the Cathars. After the first legatine missions failed, Peter of Castelnau

was sent as the new legate in 1203, but by 1207 he also was not able to end the problem.

Peter then directed his anger towards Raymond VI, Count of Toulouse, who had promised to church officials that he would rid his lands of heresy in 1205, but failed to keep these promises over the following years. After his failure to fulfil his oath and eradicate the Cathar heresy, Peter had Raymond removed. It was the third time the count had been condemned by the Church. Even though he had managed to find his way back into its good graces before, Raymond worried his luck would run out. Therefore, the Count of Toulouse invited the legate to his court for Christmas to discuss every issue. Raymond promised to obey any orders of the Church Peter gave him.

The meeting was a disaster. The arguments escalated, Raymond threatened to kill Peter, and the legate left the count's home. In the early hours of 14 January 1208, Peter and his entourage were attempting to ford the Rhône River when a man on horseback rode past and struck the legate lethally with his weapon. It was never proven whether Raymond had Peter assassinated, or if he played a part in arranging the murder, but he was accused by many.

Pope Innocent was furious when he heard of his legate's murder. On 10 March, he called for all of Christendom to rise up and end the Cathar threat. In exchange for 40 days of service in the Church's holy war, soldiers were given indulgences that essentially erased all of their sins. Thousands flocked to Lyon to join the Catholic cause. Although warriors came from different European kingdoms, the majority of the recruited soldiers were from northern France. The Albigensian Crusade had begun.

Deus vult?

The crusaders' first target was the territory of the Trencavel family, ruled by the Viscount of Béziers and Carcassonne, Raymond-Roger, the nephew of the Count of Toulouse. After a public display of submission, the Church forgave Raymond of Toulouse, and he proved his Catholic zeal by joining the crusade. As he and his nephew were not on good terms, the Count led the crusaders to the Trencavel lands so that they would avoid his territories.

Following the massacre at Béziers, the army moved towards Carcassonne. Though smaller than Béziers, its fortifications were formidable. Viscount Raymond-Roger, who led the city's defence, wanted to make a rapid assault on the besiegers with 400 knights. However, one of his trusted commanders advised against it.

"IN EXCHANGE FOR JUST 40 DAYS OF SERVICE FIGHTING IN THE CHURCH'S HOLY WAR IN LANGUEDOC, SOLDIERS WERE GIVEN INDULGENCES THAT ESSENTIALLY ERASED ALL OF THEIR SINS"

On the morning of 3 August, the crusaders made their first assault on the suburb of St Vincent. Among the crusaders was Simon de Montfort, a warrior who was instrumental in overcoming the enemy ditches to then seize the suburb after the defenders had fled. Saint Vincent was won in two hours and razed to the ground so that the crusaders could move their siege engines into position to strike the fortifications of the city. The worst part for the defenders was with the suburb taken, they had lost their main water source.

The next day, Bourg was attacked. The crusaders were bombarded with stones, and were repelled by the defenders. De Montfort proved his valour by rescuing a fellow knight with a broken leg while everyone else had fled, except for one brave squire who helped. After the assault failed, the northerners fired upon the walls of Bourg with their siege artillery.

As the siege machines battered Bourg's defences from 4-6 August, King Peter II of Aragon arrived with 100 knights. The Spanish ruler did not participate, but served as a mediator between the northerners and his vassal, Viscount Raymond-Roger Trencavel. However, King Peter failed to make any impact, so he left in anger as the siege continued. The besiegers had constructed a fortified wagon known as a 'cat' that was covered in ox hides to prevent it from igniting after defenders aimed incendiary weapons at it. The cat enabled engineers among the crusader forces to move

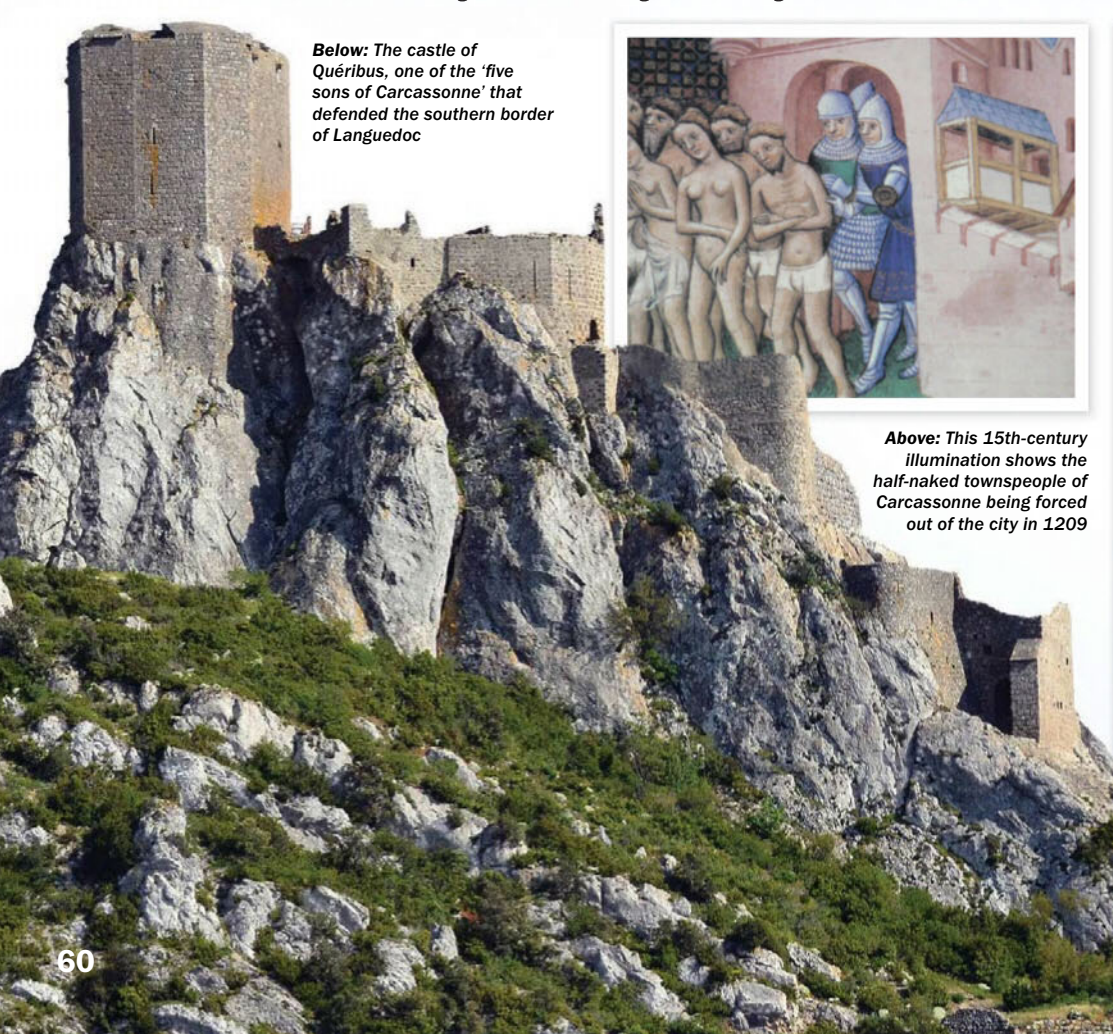
up against the walls of Bourg to undermine its foundations. On 8 August, the sappers succeeded in collapsing the wall. The suburb was then swiftly taken and burned.

Cut off from their primary water supply, and suffering from the poor conditions due to overcrowding, the people of Carcassonne surrendered. By 15 August, the viscount was imprisoned and the citizens of the city were forced to abandon Carcassonne with none of their possessions while wearing only their undergarments, or no clothing at all.

Tour of terror

After the defeats at Béziers and Carcassonne, many castles, fortified cities and strongholds throughout Languedoc submitted to the crusaders from fear. Several other southern fortresses put up resistance, but most were then taken by force. Carcassonne was made the regional headquarters of the crusader forces and a new leader was chosen. Because he was a skilled general and brave warrior, but did not have substantial lands at this point, de Montfort became the leader of the northern crusaders.

Even though a large number of soldiers had left the army, having fulfilled their 40 days of service, de Montfort still managed to seize the fortresses of Minerve, Termes, Cabaret and Lavaur over the next two years. However, the southern resistance was still strong, so when a stronghold was lightly garrisoned or vulnerable, it was taken back at every opportunity.



Below: The castle of Quéribus, one of the 'five sons of Carcassonne' that defended the southern border of Languedoc



Above: This 15th-century illumination shows the half-naked townspeople of Carcassonne being forced out of the city in 1209



This 15th-century painting shows Cathars with ropes around their necks being burnt at the stake

THE DEATH OF DE MONTFORT

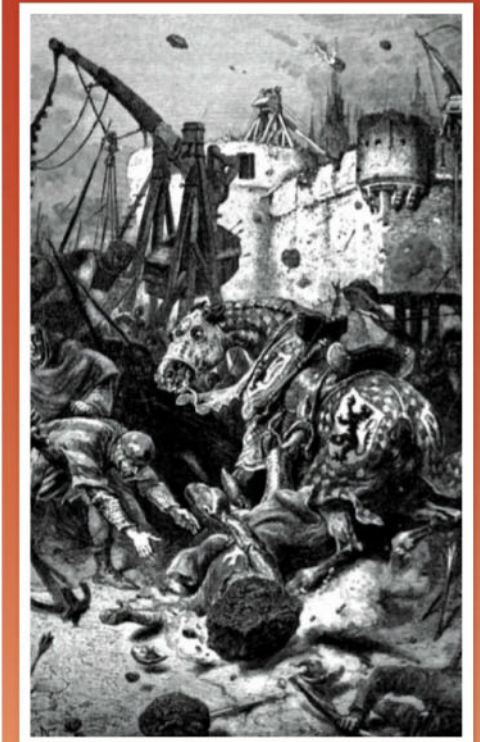
THE CRUSADER LEADER, SIMON DE MONTFORT, WAS THE CENTRAL DRIVING FORCE OF THE CRUSADE UNTIL HIS DEATH OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF TOULOUSE IN 1218

By the summer of 1218, Simon de Montfort and his northern forces still had not captured Toulouse by siege. Since the crusader army could not completely surround the huge fortified city, southern troops continued to arrive to help the defenders. Conversely, De Montfort was struggling to pay his mercenaries, so tensions remained high in the crusader camp.

Desperate to overcome the city's defences, de Montfort ordered his men to construct a huge siege tower that could fit 400 knights and 150 archers. The defenders knew the siege engine was extremely dangerous, so they planned to make a sortie and assault the belfry on 25 June. In response, De Montfort and his brother, Guy, led a group of mounted knights to repel the attack on their prized siege tower. The crusaders tried to stay upon their steeds, but a vicious volleys of crossbow bolts and artillery missiles made it incredibly difficult to remain mounted. Guy's horse was slain by a bolt to the head, and the rider was also struck in the groin. De Montfort was even hit by five arrows that caused minor wounds.

According to one source, a group of noblewomen and their daughters shot a stone from a mangonel that caused considerable damage to the crusader cause. The anonymous writer of the latter part of the *Song of the Cathar Wars*, claims the stone "struck Count Simon on his steel helmet, shattering his eyes, brains, back teeth, forehead and jaw. Bleeding and black, the count dropped dead on the ground."

Below: A 19th-century depiction of Simon de Montfort after he was slain by a stone fired from a mangonel



The siege of Carcassonne was only lifted after the defenders were cut off from their water supply

Whenever southerners captured crusaders, they would brutally murder their captives. When northerners were ambushed, every last one would be killed. Late in 1209, two northern knights, taken prisoner by a southern lord, were blinded and had their noses, upper lips and ears cut off. An abbot and his entourage were also assaulted and brutally hacked to death. Then in April 1211, at least 1,500 crusaders were ambushed at Montgey by southern forces under the command of the formidable Raymond-Roger, Count of Foix, and were killed.

The brutality of the southerners was in response to the mass murders that continued to be carried out by the northern invaders. When Minerve surrendered in July 1210, 140 Cathars were burned to death. When Lavaur was taken in May 1211, more people were burned alive than at any other point throughout the crusade. De Montfort used these horrific acts to win the war, and the plan was working for the most part until he led an army of 4,000 troops to besiege Toulouse on 17 June. Not only was the city too massive to surround, but the 30,000 people within its walls outnumbered his forces. Ten days later, the crusaders were forced to abandon the siege.

Later, Toulouse, allied with Foix and two southern magnates, raised a 1-2,000-strong force. At the Battle of Castelnaudary, the southern army faced 700 crusaders but were still defeated by de Montfort. The southerners may have been beaten, but Languedoc continued to unite as the conflict became more of a war between north and south. From the end of 1211 to 1213, a grinding guerrilla war ensued over the control of the numerous strongholds in the region. Most fortresses lost by the southerners fell back into their possession when the defenders within betrayed the crusaders – many never intended to break their original pledges of loyalty in the first place. However, the first major gain for the southern resistance came when its forces successfully stormed Le Pujol in May 1213.

This momentum stayed with the southerners in 1213, as Raymond finally convinced King Peter to intervene on behalf of his vassals in Languedoc. With the Spanish troops, the

southern army increased to 2-4,000 cavalry and thousands of infantry. On 10 September, the southern forces reached Muret and put it under siege. It did not take long before de Montfort arrived with a relief force of 800-1,000 cavalry and 700 infantry. The two armies faced each other on 12 September – Peter led the army from the centre, while Foix commanded the vanguard, with de Montfort leading his crusaders from the rearguard.

At first, the northern centre and van slammed into the southern allied army as de Montfort held the rearguard back in reserve and watched, waiting for the most opportune time to strike. After the crusaders penetrated deep into the southern ranks, the crusader general saw how vulnerable the left flank under Raymond-Roger was, and made his assault. Meanwhile, Peter was in dire straits as fierce combat had engulfed his entire army. Many of his noble warriors had perished and the king was in a fight for his life. Peter was then mortally wounded and died on the battlefield surrounded by his foremost warriors. Once the king was killed, the southern army panicked and fled the field. The number of casualties is unknown, yet it is certain that the south suffered severe losses.

The ultimate defeat

After the defeat at Muret, the south had not given up but many more towns and strongholds submitted to the crusaders. Throughout 1214 violent conflicts decreased. The pope officially ended the crusade by 1215 after Raymond, Raymond-Roger and the other leading nobles of Languedoc reconciled themselves with the Church. But the war between northern France and the south was not over. Since the southerners could no longer look to King Peter for protection, de Montfort was determined to win the independent Languedoc for his lord, the King of France. In May, the northern ruler sent his son, Prince Louis, with a large army to join de Montfort's forces.

When the northern army arrived at Toulouse, the citizens opened the city gates to them without any resistance. The northerners then destroyed much of the city's fortifications

A MEDIEVAL GUERRILLA WAR

MUTILATION AND MASS MURDER WERE A COMMON FEATURE OF THE CONFLICT IN WHICH BOTH CATHARS AND CATHOLICS MET BLOODY ENDS

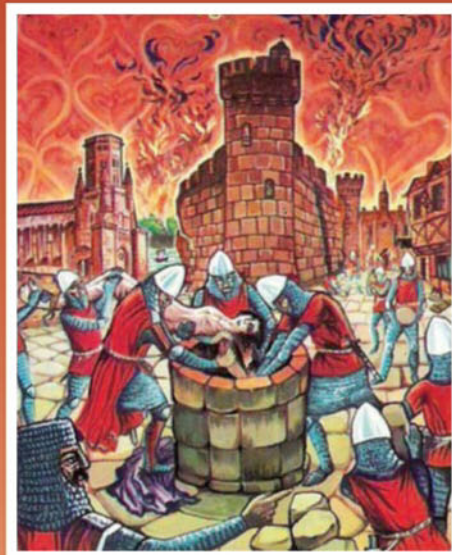
Throughout the conflict, numerous atrocities were committed by both sides. Due to the extensive knowledge of the terrain, the southerners ambushed the crusaders as much as possible. After winning several of these surprise attacks on the northerners, the captive crusaders were often mutilated or butchered regardless of their social status. However, since the fighting occurred predominately in the south, there were considerably more innocents slain among the southerners that were either burned or slaughtered after their city was taken, no matter if they were Cathar or Catholic.

One of the most brutal acts of the crusade was carried out by the northerners after a large contingent of their comrades were ambushed and completely annihilated near Montgey at the end of April 1211. In retaliation, once the crusaders had taken the fortress of Lavaur on 3 May, Simon de Montfort ordered his men to throw Giralda, the Lady of Lavaur, into a well and then drop rocks on top of her until she was crushed to death. Additionally, Lord Aimery de Montréal was hung and 80 knights were slain.

For the Cathars in the stronghold, a huge fire was made in a meadow and 300-400 of the heretics were burned alive in the massive blaze. Unlike at Béziers, the Catholic non-combatants within the city were allowed to live as long as they handed over a substantial amount of their goods and wealth to the crusaders.

“THE CAPTIVE CRUSADERS WERE OFTEN MUTILATED OR BUTCHERED REGARDLESS OF THEIR SOCIAL STATUS”

Below: A depiction of Lady Giralda bound up and about to be thrown into the well while the stones that would later crush her are shown piled beside it



and even separated the Chateau Narbonnais, Raymond's former castle, from the city walls. Despite his reconciliation with the pope, Raymond also lost all of his titles and territory, including Toulouse, to de Montfort.

The people of Languedoc had been severely wounded, but not defeated. Even though de Montfort had gained control, his access to manpower had been drastically limited because of the 40-day terms most soldiers still served. De Montfort had to rely primarily upon mercenaries and struggled to find the funds necessary to keep them. The Count of Toulouse's son, Raymond VII, exploited his vulnerability and won back the town of Beaucaire in the winter of 1216.

In July 1216 The southerners had received more good news: Pope Innocent III was dead. Reports reached de Montfort, warning that Toulouse would soon rebel, so he returned to the city to sack it. The defences were destroyed, hostages were taken, and De Montfort demanded a large amount of money from its citizens. In 1217, he left Toulouse to deal with other rebellious parts of the region, leaving behind a small garrison, and most of his family in the Chateau Narbonnais.

With de Montfort gone, Count Raymond VI travelled to Toulouse and used the cover of a thick fog to secretly enter the city with a small army of knights and dispossessed nobles on 13 September 1217. The Toulousians rejoiced at the return of their count and immediately began to slay the foreign soldiers within their city. Those who managed to escape fled to the Chateau Narbonnais. Then every man, woman and child within Toulouse helped to prepare for the inevitable siege of the city. Walls were rebuilt, new ditches were dug and barricades constructed all over the city.

Upon his arrival, de Montfort led an assault against the weakest section at the Montolieu Gate. As before in his first siege of Toulouse, De Montfort did not have a sufficient amount of men to surround the city, so his primary plan of action was to attack the weakest points: the Montolieu Gate being one of them. But the defenders were ready for the attack. Archers and crossbowmen lined the walls, supported by mangonels, which all launched a barrage of missiles down upon the besiegers.

The missile fire was so intense that de Montfort's forces could barely reach the ditch in front of the gate before they had retreat. De Montfort's younger son was severely wounded from a crossbow bolt to the chest. The siege continued for weeks, with De Montfort's assaults being constantly beaten back. The defenders left the city to raid the northerners' camp, but were repelled without causing serious damage. By December, they had not managed to break into the city, so enlisted more soldiers. Months later, a large number of northern French warriors were persuaded to help their cause. But even with reinforcements, de Montfort was still unable to take Toulouse.

The war over control of Languedoc changed considerably on 25 June when De Montfort was killed by a mangonel missile to the head. With the leader of the crusaders dead, the siege of Toulouse ended on 25 July. De Montfort's eldest son, Amaury, inherited his father's possessions but not his brutality or



Right: This 15th-century painting depicts Saint Dominic showing the Cathars that his holy texts were saved from a fire while their books were burned

relentlessness. Although the conflict would continue for decades, the death of de Montfort encouraged many nobles in Languedoc to reclaim their lost territory and titles. The morale of the southerners increased further, in the spring of 1219, when they defeated a northern army at the Battle of Baziège, slaughtering the invaders as they had at Montgey years earlier.

The high confidence of the people of Languedoc did not last long. After de Montfort's death, the King of France and his son, Louis, began to play a much larger role in the conflict, transforming the war into a conflict for the subjugation of the south. Once the prince ascended the throne, he made the conquest of Languedoc a top priority. The south could not withstand the might of the north, and by 1229 most of Languedoc had submitted. However, it was not until 1244 that the last bastions of revolt were put down, and the threat of the Cathar heresy, as well as southern independence, was finally crushed.

Statue of Raymond VI, Count of Toulouse, located in the Salle des Illustres in Toulouse



Images: Getty

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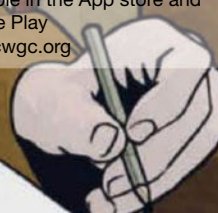


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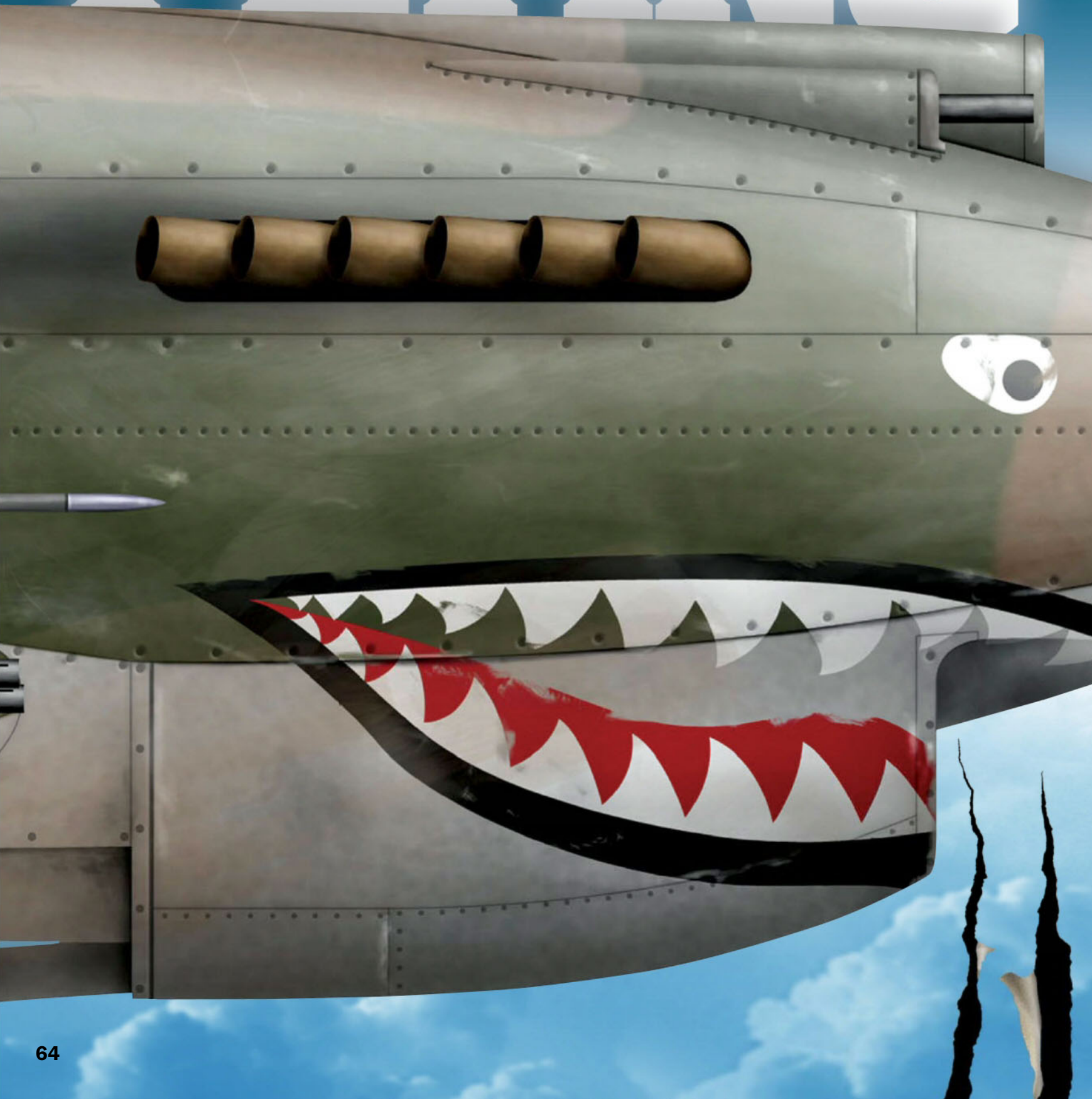
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THE

FLYING



TIGERS

WORDS MICHAEL E HASKEW



How the outnumbered fighter aces of the American Volunteer Group defied Imperial Japan in war-torn China

Left: The ferocious mouths painted on the nose were inspired by the tiger sharks painted by RAF pilots in the Mediterranean theatre on their planes

They expected a routine mission. Japanese planes owned the skies over China, but the pilots and crewmen who boarded the ten Mitsubishi Ki-21 twin-engine bombers on the morning of 20 December 1941, intended to cover the 300 air miles from their base at Hanoi to the Chinese city of Kunming, drop their incendiaries and 500-pound bombs, and return unscathed. There was no need for a fighter escort.

For a decade the armed forces of Imperial Japan had been at war on the Asian continent. They staged the Mukden Incident in 1931 as a pretext to seizing the northern province of Manchuria from China and another so-called 'incident' in 1937 at the Marco Polo Bridge, near the city of Peking, to

escalate the simmering conflict into what became known as the Second Sino-Japanese War. The Chinese resisted bravely on land and in the air. However, the resources of the Nationalist government of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek were few and often ineffective in the face of the Japanese onslaught.

Nowhere was the military contest more unequal than in the air. The Japanese flew modern planes, their pilots were well trained, and with each mission their confidence grew. Japanese fighter pilots regularly shredded the defending planes of the Republic of China Air Force, most of which were obsolete American-designed Curtiss BF2C Goshawk biplanes along with a few British, Italian, and Soviet types. Chinese pilots were often the sons of wealthy, influential families who graduated from flight training with wings pinned to their chests regardless of proficiency.

These ill-prepared fliers were often killed, their valuable aircraft destroyed in takeoff and landing incidents, while those who managed

“NOWHERE WAS THE MILITARY CONTEST MORE UNEQUAL THAN IN THE AIR. THE JAPANESE FLEW MODERN PLANES, THEIR PILOTS WERE WELL TRAINED, AND WITH EACH MISSION THEIR CONFIDENCE GREW”



Chinese soldiers and armoured personnel of 74th Fighter Squadron inspecting a Curtiss P-40 in Kunming, China, 1 February 1943

to engage in aerial combat fell to Japanese guns at an alarming rate. By 1941, although the Republic of China Air Force officially listed a complement of 500 planes, which was probably overstated, barely 90 aircraft were considered battleworthy at any given time.

However, during that morning mission to Kunming, the Japanese were made keenly aware that the situation in the skies above China, and neighbouring Burma, had been dramatically altered. As they approached their target, the Japanese pilots spotted something unusual. Four tiny dots were rapidly bearing down on them, and it was soon apparent that these were hostile fighter planes. The Japanese released their bombs 30 miles southeast of Kunming and turned for home at high speed.

These unexpected attackers were, in fact, Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk fighters led by Lieutenant John V 'Scarsdale Jack' Newkirk. Ten more P-40s joined the pursuit, and one by one the Japanese bombers were shot to pieces, exploding in midair or trailing thick, black smoke as they spiralled into the ground. A single bomber survived to report the details of

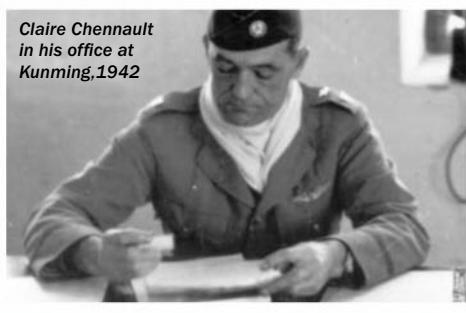
“ONE BY ONE THE JAPANESE BOMBERS WERE SHOT TO PIECES, EXPLODING IN MIDAIR OR TRAILING THICK, BLACK SMOKE AS THEY SPIRALLED INTO THE GROUND. A SINGLE BOMBER SURVIVED TO REPORT THE DETAILS OF THE HARROWING MISSION”

the harrowing mission. The crewmen described their attackers as heavy, single-engine fighters with snarling shark's mouths painted on their engine cowlings. Their comrades had been the first victims of the flamboyant airmen of the American Volunteer Group (AVG), popularly known as the Flying Tigers.

The initial aerial combat mission of the Flying Tigers had been a resounding success, and newspaper reports flashed across the globe. This provided a much-needed morale boost for the American public, still stunned by the sudden attack on Pearl Harbor that had plunged the nation into World War II only two weeks earlier, and offering hope to the beleaguered Chinese.

For years, Chiang Kai-shek had realised that he needed help from the United States to stem the Japanese tide. However, a major obstacle to securing American aid was the simple fact the country was not a belligerent during the 1930s. An overt act to provide military support to China might, in fact, provoke the Japanese into declaring war on the United States. Nevertheless, Chiang possessed two quite powerful assets in his quest for American assistance. His wife, Soong Mei-ling, also known as Madame Chiang, was a charming and shrewd political pragmatist, while the Nationalists also benefited from a powerful lobby in the United States led by her brother, TV Soong, who moved easily through the halls of power in Washington, DC.

Claire Chennault in his office at Kunming, 1942



The Mitsubishi Ki-21 was the first Japanese aircraft encountered by the Flying Tigers



Members of the 3rd Squadron, 'Hell's Angels', fly in formation, 1942



A Chinese soldier stands guard over a P-40E Warhawk. The plane was flown by Major John Petach who accumulated 5.25 kills



CBI AIR RAGE

FLYING TIGER PILOTS IN THEIR CURTISS P-40 WARHAWK FIGHTERS FOUGHT SUPERIOR NUMBERS OF JAPANESE PLANES ABOVE CHINA AND BURMA

Madame Chiang was charged with raising the combat prowess of the Republic of China Air Force, and she proved quite capable in the role. Without doubt, her most significant accomplishment was in persuading a grizzled American captain to come out of retirement in Louisiana, travel halfway around the world, and take on the monumental task of revitalising that flagging fortunes of the Chinese air arm.

Claire Lee Chennault was a veteran of the US Air Corps and a former stunt flier. To the detriment of his career, he had also been a tireless, vocal champion of developing fighter aircraft and tactics, during an era that was dominated by senior officers who promoted the deployment of heavy bombers bristling with guns. The prevailing sentiment among these officers was that the big bombers could defend themselves without the help of fighter escorts, pound enemy cities and military targets, and actually win a modern war by raining devastation from the skies.

Chennault never bought into that concept and argued forcefully against the prevailing fighter tactics that emerged during World War I. "There was too much of an air of medieval jousting in the dogfights," he said boldly, "and not enough of the calculated massing of overwhelming force so necessary in the cold, cruel business of war." He believed that fighter pilots should work together in pairs and in larger numbers rather than as lone hunters, and in 1935 he put his theories on paper in the book *The Role of Defensive Pursuit*.

Within months of his book's publication, Chennault was serving as an instructor at Maxwell Field, Alabama. He was notified that the teaching of fighter tactics was to be terminated. Suffering from hearing loss sustained during hours of flying in open cockpits along with chronic bronchitis, Chennault retired with 20 years of service in 1937, still a junior officer at the age of 47.

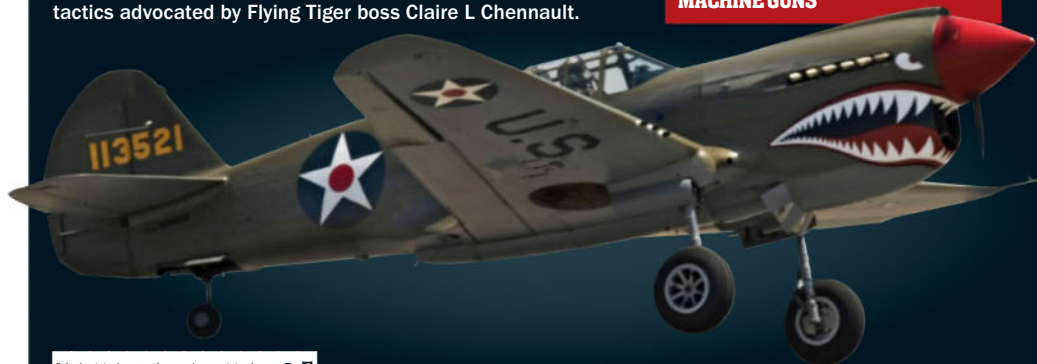
Although few in Chennault's own country had paid any attention to his fighter doctrine, General Mao Pang-tso of the Republic of China Air Force attended one of his flying demonstrations and passed along his favourable impressions of the American pilot's skills. It was then that Madame Chiang charmed Chennault, who visited the country in the spring of 1937 during negotiations to procure his services. He later remarked, "She will always be a princess to me."

In his own way, Chennault learned to manipulate Madame Chiang, tendering his resignation to her when the Nationalist government moved too slowly regarding some issue or failed to provide support in a timely manner. Madame Chiang always refused to accept the commander's resignation, and she remained his foremost advocate during later contentious disagreements with General Joseph Stilwell, the American commander in the China-Burma-India Theater (CBI) during World War II. Through his association with Madame Chiang, and the exploits of the Flying Tiger pilots, he would soon command, Chennault became one of America's early heroes of the war, exerting tremendous influence on its conduct in the CBI.

CURTISS P-40 WARHAWK

Fast in level flight and capable of out-diving the Japanese fighters that the pilots of the American Volunteer Group faced, the Curtiss P-40 fighter was well suited to the 'boom and zoom' tactics advocated by Flying Tiger boss Claire L Chennault.

YEARS IN SERVICE: 1939-1945
MAX SPEED: 580 KM/H (360 MPH)
ARMAMENT: SIX .50-Z (12.7MM)
**BROWNING M2
MACHINE GUNS**



NAKAJIMA KI-27

Lightly armed and armoured, the Nakajima Ki-27 fighter, nicknamed 'Nate' by the Allies, was highly manoeuvrable and easily out-turned Allied opponents flying Curtiss P-40s in a dogfight. However, it was rapidly outclassed by other aircraft types early in World War II.

YEARS IN SERVICE: 1937-1945
MAX SPEED: 470 KM/H (292 MPH)
ARMAMENT: TWO 7.7MM TYPE 89
MACHINE GUNS



"THE NAKAJIMA KI-27 FIGHTER WAS HIGHLY MANOEUVRABLE AND EASILY OUT-TURNED ALLIED OPPONENTS"

MITSUBISHI A6M ZERO

One of the legendary fighters of World War II, the Mitsubishi A6M Zero was highly manoeuvrable, heavily armed, and superior to early Allied types. ROC Air Force pilots faced the Zero, but debate continues as to whether Flying Tiger pilots did.

YEARS IN SERVICE: 1940-1945
MAX SPEED: 534 KM/H (332 MPH)
ARMAMENT: TWO 7.7MM TYPE 97
MACHINE GUNS: TWO 20MM TYPE
99-1 CANNON



Chennault took to his initial task with renewed vigour, enhancing the training of Chinese pilots and establishing an early warning network to alert his bases to incoming Japanese air raids. Among the formidable enemy aircraft his pilots faced was the Nakajima Ki-27 fighter, which was introduced in 1937, and later the Nakajima Ki-43 and the legendary Mitsubishi A6M Zero.

Chennault admonished his pilots to be wary of the nimble enemy planes and to avoid single combat. "Never get into a dogfight with the Zero," he told them. "When you spot the Zeroes, make one diving run with guns blazing, and then get the hell out of there!"

Chennault did his best, but Japanese air power was overwhelming, and large formations of enemy bombers hit Chinese cities at will while fighter planes strafed Chinese troops on the ground. As the situation worsened, Chiang Kai-shek turned to his brother-in-law. Soong persuaded President Franklin D Roosevelt to allow Chennault to quietly recruit American pilots and to eventually purchase 100 new Curtiss P-40 fighters for these 'volunteers'. The planes had been earmarked for the British through the Lend-Lease program but were considered outdated and rejected for service with the RAF.

Six months prior to Pearl Harbor, Chennault had successfully recruited 112 American pilots, who were allowed to resign from the US armed forces and join the Chinese with the promise that they could return to the American military if the United States became a belligerent or when their contracts with the Chinese were completed. The lure of adventure and a fat paycheck weighed heavily in the decisions of these young men. The American Volunteer Group paid \$750 a month to a squadron leader, \$675 to a flight leader, and \$600 to a wingman. Ground crewmen were compensated handsomely from \$150 to \$300 a month depending on an individual's skill set. To sweeten the pot, the Generalissimo added a \$500 bounty for every confirmed shootdown of a Japanese plane.

In the interest of operational secrecy, the American pilots were provided with fake documents and information that presented them as individuals with occupations from engineers to tailors and Vaudeville performers. "I joined the AVG in July 1941," remembered Donald Whelpley, who became the group's lead meteorologist. "At that time my duty assignment was Navy meteorologist to Patrol Squadron 54, Naval Air Station, Norfolk, Virginia," he continued. "When the Navy finally realised that I was serious about resigning my commission to join Chennault in China, they released me for a one-year tour with the AVG. Little did any of us realise what we had gotten ourselves into."

"CHENNAULT ADMONISHED HIS PILOTS TO BE WARY OF THE NIMBLE ENEMY PLANES AND TO AVOID SINGLE COMBAT. "NEVER GET INTO A DOGFIGHT WITH THE ZERO," HE TOLD THEM. "WHEN YOU SPOT THE ZEROES, MAKE ONE DIVING RUN WITH GUNS BLAZING, AND THEN GET THE HELL OUT OF THERE!""



CURTISS P-40

THE WARBIRDS OF THE AVG MAY BE REMEMBERED FOR THEIR ICONIC NOSE ART, BUT IT TOOK MORE THAN GRAPHIC DESIGN TO WIN THE AIR WAR FOR CHINESE FREEDOM

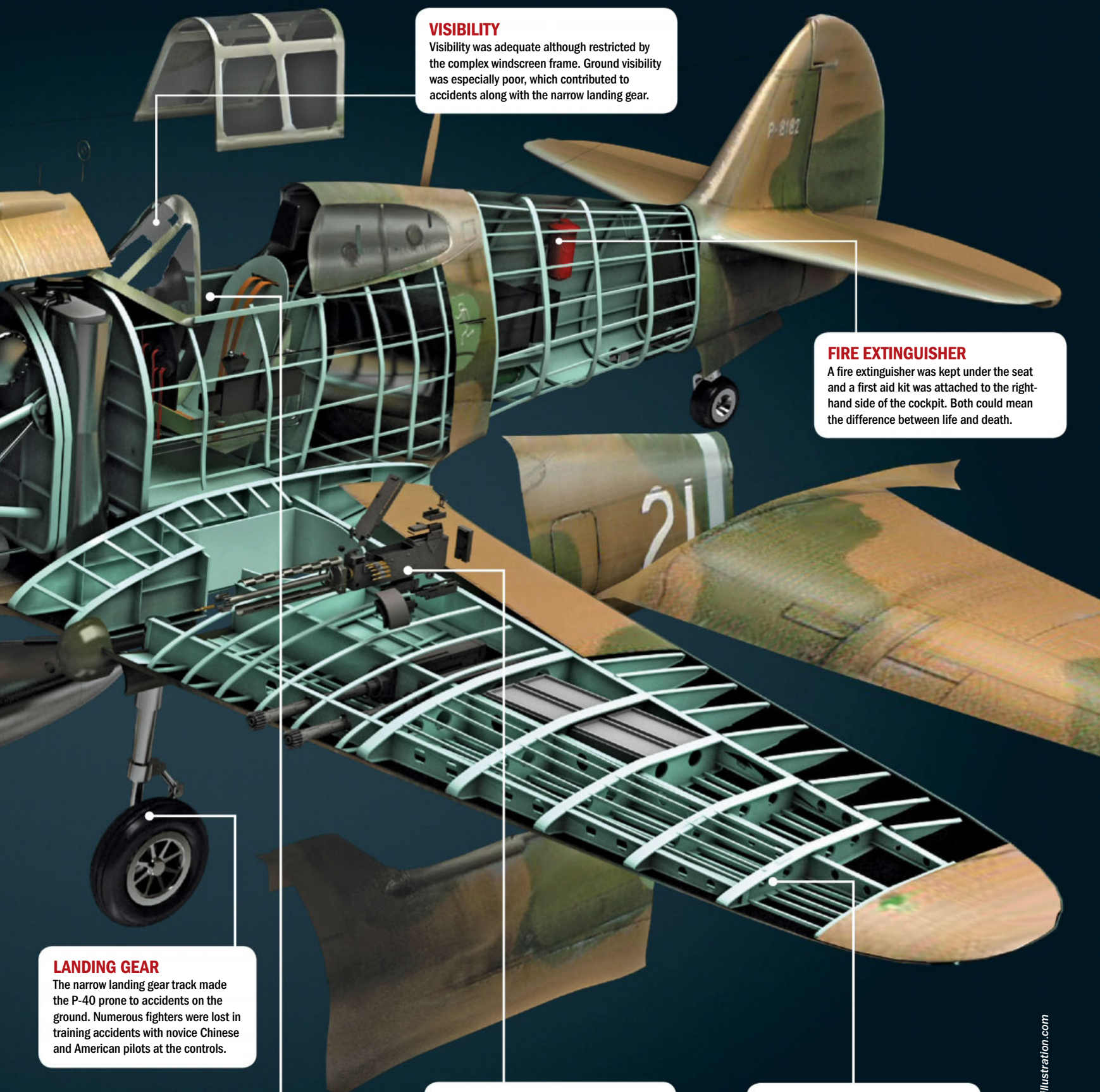


MOUTH & EYE

The distinctive shark's mouth and menacing eye became world famous as emblems of the Flying Tigers. The pilots painted the nose cowls of their P-40s to strike fear in the hearts of enemy airmen.

ENGINE

The Allison V-1710 12-cylinder liquid-cooled engine produced 1,350 horsepower and a maximum speed of 378 miles per hour. The V-1710 was the only engine of its kind produced in the United States during World War II.

**VISIBILITY**

Visibility was adequate although restricted by the complex windscreen frame. Ground visibility was especially poor, which contributed to accidents along with the narrow landing gear.

FIRE EXTINGUISHER

A fire extinguisher was kept under the seat and a first aid kit was attached to the right-hand side of the cockpit. Both could mean the difference between life and death.

LANDING GEAR

The narrow landing gear track made the P-40 prone to accidents on the ground. Numerous fighters were lost in training accidents with novice Chinese and American pilots at the controls.

COCKPIT

The armoured cockpit absorbed punishment and contributed to pilot survivability. In contrast, Japanese aircraft were lightly armoured and quite susceptible to explosions in midair.

ARMAMENT

.50-calibre Browning M2 machine guns provided heavy firepower. Some variants of the P-40 also mounted .30-calibre machine guns; however, the heavier Browning M2 was more effective against enemy targets.

AIRFRAME

The steel airframe made the aircraft heavy and rugged. Such construction made the P-40 capable of absorbing tremendous amounts of enemy fire and bringing its pilot home safely. Ground crewmen patched damaged aircraft and got them back into their air as rapidly as possible.

THE FLYING TIGERS

The recruits sailed to China and maintained their cover. Some of them posed as employees of the Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company (CAMCO), which operated a facility in Burma that assembled planes for the Chinese. By the summer of 1941, Chennault was putting them through their paces at an airfield in Loiwing, China, near the border with Burma.

A remedial training school was established after it was discovered that some of the recruits had lied about their experience in 'pursuit planes' and had only flown bombers or transports. Chennault lectured the aviators regularly, often using a chalkboard to illustrate his points, and shook his head in despair when one of his precious P-40s was damaged in training. The young pilots embraced Chennault's teachings and began referring to the commander as 'Old Leatherface'.

The AVG's P-40s were shipped in crates from New York, but even before they were assembled and took flight, one of the planes met an unfortunate fate. The first of the crates was being loaded into the hold of a freighter when the cable snapped, sending the entire load into the Hudson River below. The engine and all the cockpit controls were damaged beyond repair – and just like that the AVG was down to 99 planes. If Chennault considered the accident a bad omen, he shrugged it off and kept that sentiment to himself. The remaining planes were shipped to Burma, where they were assembled at the CAMCO factory outside the port city and capital of



Above: A 'blood chit' given to the Flying Tigers by the Nationalist Chinese government. It would be used as identification so that downed airmen could get aid from any Chinese civilian they came across.

Rangoon. Test flights took place at a nearby airfield, and the P-40s were then delivered to the AVG.

Chennault organised his planes and pilots into three squadrons of equal size. The 1st Squadron, with fuselage numbers 1-33, was nicknamed the Adam and Eves. The 2nd Squadron, fuselage numbers 34-66, was dubbed the Panda Bears, and the 3rd Squadron, fuselage numbers 67-99, was called the Hell's Angels. For a time, the

AVG pilots and their ground crew shared the Kyedaw airfield near Toungoo, Burma, with units of the RAF.

Some of the AVG pilots heard that RAF personnel of No 112 Squadron, flying P-40s based in North Africa, had painted the mouths of fearsome tiger sharks on their engine cowlings, probably copying the design from a unit of the German Luftwaffe they had encountered over the Mediterranean Sea. The artists among the Americans went to work replicating the razor-toothed jaws, and soon the Chinese began referring to the mercenary pilots as 'Flying Tigers'. The nickname stuck, and a cartoonist from Walt Disney Studios complemented the gaping sharks' mouths with the image of a stylish Bengal tiger wearing wings and leaping through a 'V' for victory emblazoned on the fuselages of many P-40s.

Although they flew as a combat unit for only seven months, from December 1941 to July 1942, the Flying Tigers gained lasting fame in the skies of the CBI during World War II. Training mishaps, mechanical failures – particularly with the P-40's Allison engine – and combat damage continually reduced the number of operational aircraft, and Chennault never had more than 55 planes and 70 pilots at his disposal. Still, the Flying Tigers compiled a remarkable record, debunking the myth of Japanese aerial invincibility in the process. During those frenetic days, the AVG claimed 299 enemy planes – destroyed both in the air along with scores on the ground – shot up



CHRISTMAS COMBAT

PERHAPS THE MOST DRAMATIC ENGAGEMENT OF THE FLYING TIGERS' BRIEF COMBAT HISTORY TOOK PLACE ON CHRISTMAS DAY, 1941

On 25 December 1941, the Japanese launched their second heavy air raid against Rangoon, the Burmese capital, in 48 hours. At Mingaladon airfield, north of the city, Christmas Day was a muggy muggy 46 degrees Celsius, smothering the pilots of the Flying Tigers' 3rd Squadron, the Hell's Angels. Suddenly, the air raid siren wailed. 13 Hell's Angels pilots sprinted to their Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk fighters, joined by 16 pilots of No 67 Squadron RAF flying the Brewster Buffalo.

Just past noon, the characteristic V-formations of 71 enemy bombers and at least 30 fighters appeared. Charles Older, who had flamed two enemy bombers on 23 December,

roared upward in a near-vertical climb, opening fire at 200 yards and tearing an enemy plane apart with his six .50-calibre machine guns. Executing a flawless 'boom and zoom', he broke away in a power dive and made another pass. This time, a second bomber fell to his guns.

When the Japanese turned toward home, Older pounced on an escorting Nakajima Ki-43 'Oscar' fighter and sent it spiralling earthward for his fifth kill. He had become an ace.

Flying Tiger Robert P 'Duke' Hedman was credited with four Japanese bombers and a fighter, attaining the coveted status of ace in a single day. George McMillan shot down three

enemy planes, while Tommy Haywood and Ed Overend each claimed a pair to their tally.

As Robert 'RT' Smith pulled away from his second kill against the bombers, he confronted an Oscar slicing toward him head-on, guns blazing. Smith held steady. His P-40 shuddered as bullets from its guns raked the enemy. In a flash, the Japanese plane passed below, billowing smoke before rolling over and plunging into the Gulf of Martaban. The Flying Tigers and their RAF allies claimed 32 aerial victories in the swirling Christmas Day battle, while only two P-40s were shot down along with four Buffaloes.

"FLYING TIGER ROBERT P 'DUKE' HEDMAN, WAS CREDITED WITH FOUR JAPANESE BOMBERS AND A FIGHTER, BECOMING AN ACE IN A DAY"

The Japanese expected the Ki-43 Oscar to perform well against Curtiss P-40s



“CHENNAULT LECTURED THE AVIATORS REGULARLY, OFTEN USING A CHALKBOARD TO ILLUSTRATE HIS POINTS, AND SHOOK HIS HEAD IN DESPAIR WHEN ONE OF HIS PRECIOUS P-40S WAS DAMAGED IN TRAINING”

*General Henry 'Hap' Arnold
inspects the Flying Tigers
squadron with Claire Chennault*



THE FLYING TIGERS

during dangerous strafing runs. Its top scoring aces accounted for more than 60 Japanese aircraft. They included Robert Neale with 13 victories, Ed Rector with 10.5, David Lee 'Tex' Hill with 10.25, and George Burgard, Robert Little, and Charles Older each with ten.

In turn, the Flying Tigers lost four pilots in the air to Japanese planes, six who were killed during strafing runs against ground targets, three who perished in training accidents, and three who died during enemy bombing raids. Three AVG pilots were shot down and taken prisoner. A dozen P-40s were lost in aerial combat, while another 61 were destroyed on the ground during enemy air raids, in training accidents, or deliberately when the airfield at Loiwing was hastily evacuated with the fall of Burma in May 1942.

Chennault initially deployed the Flying Tigers into two groups, defending both Rangoon and western China, where the Burma Road, the tortuous overland lifeline of supplies that stretched 600 miles from Lashio in northern

“ADDING TO THE FLYING TIGER MYSTIQUE WAS THE CAVALIER ATTITUDE OF THE PILOTS AND THEIR DISDAIN FOR MILITARY PROTOCOL”

Burma to Kunming, snaked through mountains and valleys.

The first Flying Tiger missions were flown on 8 December 1941, the day after Pearl Harbor. As word of their success became public, the pilots were lionised in the press. Following one notable air battle, a newspaper crowed, “Last week ten Japanese bombers came winging their carefree way up into Yunnan, heading directly for Kunming, the terminus of the Burma Road. 30 miles south of Kunming, the Flying Tigers swooped, let the Japanese have it,” the paper continued. “Of the ten bombers, four plummeted to Earth in flames. The rest turned tail and fled. Tiger casualties: none.”

Even the Japanese grudgingly acknowledged the toll the Flying Tigers were taking as the aggressive pilots employed Chennault's maxim, “Use your speed and diving power to make a pass, shoot, and break away! Never, never, in a P-40, try to outmanoeuvre and perform acrobatics with a Jap Zero. Such tactics, take it from me, are strictly non-habit forming.”

Radio Tokyo issued a stern warning that AVG personnel rather enjoyed. “The American pilots in Chinese planes are unprincipled bandits,” the propagandist blared. “Unless they cease their unorthodox tactics they will be treated as guerrillas.” The broadcast was a veiled threat that if a Flying Tiger pilot was captured he might well be executed.

Adding to the Flying Tiger mystique was the cavalier attitude of the pilots and their disdain for military protocol. Little attention was paid

to rank or station, and there was simply no such thing as a regulation uniform. Footwear included Cowboy boots with thick heels.

The pilots also engaged in aerial antics, performing aerobic feats and slow, low victory rolls to celebrate kills when they returned from combat missions.

Alcohol flowed freely, and one story relates that a group of Flying Tigers persuaded the pilot of a C-47 transport plane to conduct a nocturnal ‘air raid’ on Hanoi. The Americans scrounged for any explosives they could find, including old ordnance of French and even Russian manufacture. Fortified with liquid courage, they packed the C-47's cargo hold with bombs. When they arrived above their target, they reportedly opened the side door, kicking and rolling the explosives into the night.

Before Chennault withdrew all AVG fighters from Burma in the spring of 1942, the Flying Tigers engaged in several large-scale aerial battles with the Japanese, and their RAF allies joined in as well. On 23 December 1941, a flight of 12 Hell's Angels P-40s along with Brewster Buffalo fighters of No 67 Squadron RAF engaged a formation of Japanese Ki-21 bombers headed for Rangoon. The Allied planes shot down five bombers and four escorting fighters, but a pair of P-40s was lost. Despite the better kill results, Chennault considered the mission a setback since he had few planes or pilots to spare.

On 25 February 1942, a force of 166 Japanese fighters and bombers attacked



Maintenance on a Curtiss P-40 at Kunming, China, circa 1941



TIGER ROLL CALL

A NUMBER OF FLYING TIGER PILOTS ACHIEVED SUCCESS DURING AND AFTER THEIR DAYS WITH THE FAMOUS FIGHTER GROUP



BRIGADIER GENERAL DAVID
LEE 'TEX' HILL

Tex Hill served as both a flight and squadron commander with the Panda Bears and remained in China to train pilots and lead the 23rd Fighter Group of the US Army Air Forces, ending the war with 15.25 aerial victories. After World War II, Hill engaged in mining, ranching, and oil speculation. He remained in the Army Reserve and in 1946 became the commander of the newly formed Texas Air National Guard. Promoted to brigadier general at the age of 31, he was the youngest general officer in the history of the Air National Guard. Hill retired from duty in 1968 and became a frequent guest at air shows and events commemorating the Flying Tigers around the world. In 2002, he received the Distinguished Service Cross for valour, 60 years after the engagement for which he was being recognised. Hill died at his home in Texas in 2007. He was 92 years old.

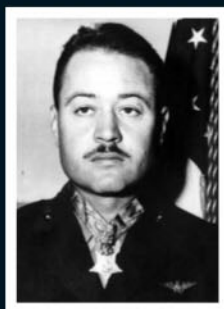


COLONEL ED RECTOR

Ed Rector was serving as a naval aviator, flying from the aircraft carrier USS Ranger, when he resigned his commission to join the American Volunteer Group. Rector scored the Flying Tigers' first aerial victory against the Japanese in combat above the Chinese city of Kunming on 20 December 1941. He was the second-highest scoring ace of the AVG with 10.5 kills and went on to command the 76th Fighter Squadron of the 23rd Fighter Group, shooting down two enemy fighters on 25 September 1942. As commander of the 23rd Fighter Group, he recorded

his last kill, and reportedly the last for the unit, on 2 April 1945. Rector remained in China after the war, serving as a military advisor. He retired from the US Air Force in 1962 and worked as an aviation consultant in numerous countries. He died on 26 April 2001 at the age of 84.

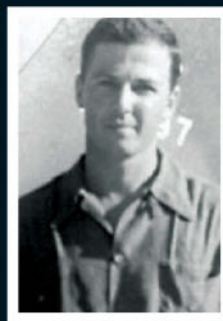
"RECTOR SCORED THE FLYING TIGERS' FIRST AERIAL VICTORY AGAINST THE JAPANESE IN COMBAT ABOVE THE CHINESE CITY OF KUNMING ON 20 DECEMBER 1941"



COLONEL GREGORY
'PAPPY' BOYINGTON

The best known of the Flying Tigers, Colonel Gregory Boyington, served as a flight leader with the AVG and was credited with two Japanese planes. Originally a Marine pilot, Boyington rejoined the Corps in September 1942 and became famous commanding Fighter Squadron 214 (VMF-214), the 'Black Sheep', in the Solomons. At 31, Boyington was older than the other pilots. They called him 'Pappy'.

Boyington became the top Marine ace of World War II with 28 victories. He received the Medal of Honor for an engagement in which 24 Corsairs shot down 20 enemy fighters with no losses. On 3 January 1944, Boyington had just flamed his 28th enemy plane when he was shot down. He spent 20 months in a prison camp. Boyington retired from the Marines in 1947 and worked at various jobs. The television series *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, more fiction than fact, brought notoriety. He died at the age of 75 on 11 January 1988.



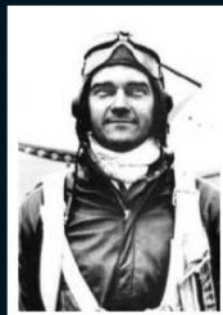
LIEUTENANT COLONEL
CHARLES OLDER

A leading AVG ace, Charles Older entered flight training with the US Marine Corps after graduating from college in 1939. He resigned to join the AVG in the summer of 1941 and participated in aerial engagements above Rangoon, Burma, in December.

Flying with the 3rd Squadron, Hell's Angels, Older completed his AVG tour with ten victories. Returning to the US in the summer of 1942, he joined the US Army Air Forces. He later served in China as operations officer and deputy commander of the 23rd Fighter Group. At the end of World War II, he had tallied 18 kills.

After the war ended, Older graduated with a law degree from the University of Southern California. In 1967, Governor Ronald Reagan appointed him to Superior Court in Los Angeles. Judge Older presided over the trial of notorious murderer Charles Manson. He died at his home in Los Angeles on 17 June 2006 at the age of 88.

"FLYING WITH THE 3RD SQUADRON, HELL'S ANGELS, OLDER COMPLETED HIS AVG TOUR WITH TEN VICTORIES"



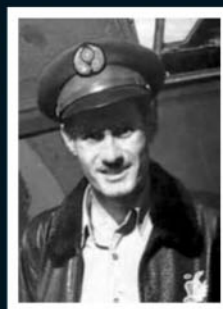
MAJOR GENERAL
CHARLES BOND

A US Army Air Forces pilot, Charles Bond, resigned his commission, arriving in Burma on 12 November 1941, to join the Flying Tigers. He was credited with seven aerial victories and was shot down twice. Some historians credit Bond as the first Flying Tiger to paint the famous shark mouth on his P-40 fighter.

In October 1942, Bond rejoined the Army Air Forces, serving as the pilot for W Averell Harriman, US Ambassador to the Soviet Union. After World

War II, he worked as a commercial pilot before returning to the military. In the 1950s, he commanded the 25th and 28th Air Divisions. During the Vietnam War, he led the 2nd Air Division and the 12th and 13th Air Forces.

Bond retired in 1968. In 1984, his book, *A Flying Tiger's Diary*, became a bestseller. Bond served as a consultant for Texas Instruments and died on 18 August 2009, at the age of 94.



LIEUTENANT COLONEL
ROBERT T SMITH

Robert T Smith was an early Flying Tiger commitment, resigning from the US Army Air Forces in July 1941. He flew his first combat mission on 23 December, shooting down a Japanese bomber while sharing credit for another. On Christmas Day 1941, Smith shot down three enemy planes. He became flight leader in the AVG's 3rd Squadron, the Hell's Angels. When the AVG was disbanded, he had tallied 8.9 aerial victories.

Soon Smith returned to the Army Air Forces. He commanded the 337th Fighter Squadron, the 329th Fighter Group, and the 1st Air Commando Group, leading medium bombers and flying fighter escort missions.

After retiring from the military, Smith flew as a commercial pilot, wrote radio scripts, and worked for the Flying Tiger Line, the first air cargo company in the US. He published a book, *Tale of the Tiger*, based on his diaries. Smith died on 21 August 1995, at the age of 77.

Rangoon. Nine Flying Tiger pilots gunned the engines of their P-40s and descended on the enemy like avenging angels. 24 Japanese aircraft were shot down in flames, while three P-40s were lost.

A day later, 200 more Japanese aircraft appeared above the city, and six Flying Tiger P-40s mounted a spirited defence, roaring through the Japanese formations to claim 18 enemy planes destroyed.

19 Flying Tiger pilots were officially credited with five or more confirmed aerial victories during their combat tours with the AVG, achieving ace status. Tex Hill served as a flight leader and squadron commander with the Panda Bears and, in addition to his 10.25 kills with the AVG, finished the war with 15.25. He scored his first aerial victories on 3 January 1942, during a strafing mission against the Japanese airfield at Tak, Thailand, and vividly recalled the encounter.

"I was really excited as we neared the target area. It was then that I noticed there were too many of us in formation," Hill remembered. "Somehow a Japanese Zero swooped in and got on the tail of the P-40 in front of me. I pulled the trigger, fired my machine guns, and shot the Zero down. Unknown to me there was another Zero up there with us, but I didn't see him in time. He put 33 bullet holes in my P-40 fuselage before I could break away.

"Later, during that same mission, another Jap came in straight at me – head on!" Hill continued. "I held the machine-gun trigger down. We got closer and closer. I thought we were going to collide, but he just blew up in front of me. I never touched a piece of his wreckage either."

Although Hill identified his victims as Zeroes, other accounts refer to them as a

pair of Ki-27s. Chennault also had described enemy fighters as Zeroes, and debate continues as to whether the Flying Tigers actually fought the fabled Japanese plane during their seven months of aerial combat. Some sources support the claim that the P-40 pilots did battle Zeroes, while others assert that the Imperial Japanese Navy had withdrawn its assets from the Asian mainland prior to the AVG's entry into combat. In either case, the majority of enemy fighters that the American pilots duelled in the air above China and Burma were Ki-27s, nicknamed 'Nate' by the Allies, and the Ki-43 'Oscar', a Japanese Army fighter that bore a close resemblance to the Zero – accounting for some confusion.

Through it all, the Flying Tigers' ground crews performed minor miracles, managing to keep enough P-40s in the air to continually battle the Japanese. Damaged planes were cannibalised for spare parts. Supplies were scarce, and those that did arrive had travelled an immense distance across ocean, by rail, and in the air. Despite having no bomb racks fitted to their planes, the Flying Tigers even improvised some explosives, rigging pipe bombs to parachutes originally intended for flares and filling empty scotch and whiskey bottles with gasoline as makeshift incendiaries.

During an interview with a war correspondent, one Flying Tiger pilot asked the reporter to, "Save some big words for our ground crews. They have gone through strafings, dodged bombs, and have always been out there working on our planes at all hours."

On 4 July 1942, the American Volunteer Group was officially disbanded. Reconstituted as the China Air Task Force of the US Army Air Forces, the squadrons later joined the 23rd Fighter Group of the Fourteenth Air Force, which

"19 FLYING TIGER PILOTS WERE OFFICIALLY CREDITED WITH FIVE OR MORE CONFIRMED AERIAL VICTORIES DURING THEIR COMBAT TOURS WITH THE AVG, ACHIEVING ACE STATUS"

subsequently adopted the nickname of the Flying Tigers. Five veteran AVG pilots, including Tex Hill, remained with the 23rd Fighter Group to train new pilots.

Meanwhile, in April 1942, Claire Chennault returned to the Army Air Forces with the rank of colonel, commanding the China Air Task Force. His weathered face made the cover of the 10 August 1942, issue of *Life* magazine. Even though the Flying Tigers had ceased to exist as an independent fighting force a month earlier, their exploits remained popular with the media.

In March 1943, Chennault was promoted to the rank of major general and given command of the Fourteenth Air Force, a post that he held until August 1945. He retired that October and died in Washington, DC, at the age of 67 on 27 July 1958.

The legacy of the Flying Tigers is one of grit, determination, and bravery against overwhelming odds. Surely this handful of American pilots should continue to capture the imagination today not solely because they dared to take on the Japanese – but also because they consistently bested their enemy in the air.

Images: Alamy, Mary Evans, Getty, Rex Features

A Flying Tiger veteran photographed in front of an image of his comrades, at Kunming Museum, China





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Nagorno-Karabakh

For 30 years Armenia and Azerbaijan have been squabbling over Nagorno-Karabakh, a mountainous region whose tangled history of conflict has obscure origins and seemingly no end

WORDS MIGUEL MIRANDA

Not a week goes by when gunfire doesn't echo in the No Man's Land separating the Armenians from the Azeris. Each side observes the other through concrete sentry posts where a lone soldier watches from a narrow slit. His field of vision is confined to an empty kilometre. Unless he is using a periscope or a pair of binoculars, he often can't see his adversaries.

In recent years, the presence of drones floating high above has cast small shadows on Nagorno-Karabakh's hills and valleys. The territory is a mountainous province dotted with Armenian villages. Even its so-called capital, Stepanakert, is laid back and isn't bedevilled by the chaos of a thriving metropolis – more like a small town for a contested republic.

Because that's what Nagorno-Karabakh is. Armenia refers to it as Artsakh, after the ancient kingdom from before the Islamic conquest in the 7th century. But Azerbaijan, burdened with a hostile enclave of ethnic Armenians who have wanted to join their mother country since 1988, maintains its familiar name: the Mountainous Black Garden.

In April 2016, the usual tension was interrupted by a full-scale assault by Azeri forces on the Armenians. Officially, the combat lasted just four days. Unofficially, it dissipated by 5 April when two high-ranking officers – an Armenian general and Azeri colonel – flew to Moscow and were compelled to reason.

The following day, when details of the most serious warfare in Nagorno-Karabakh since 1994 had gone viral on social media, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev made personal visits to Yerevan, the Armenian capital, and

then Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. By the weekend it was apparent the peace held. No further battles occurred along the frontline, although Azeri media, always outraged by the very existence of Nagorno-Karabakh, published detailed reports of flagrant violations by the Armenians who were in turn blaming the Azeris for 'ISIS'-style brutality.

The unresolved war over Nagorno-Karabakh doesn't resonate beyond the Caucasus. The small region is already a patchwork of great and minor wars simmering at low intensity. Russian special forces are busy hunting Islamists in Dagestan. Georgia is bracing itself from the slow encroachment of Abkhazia and South Ossetia within its borders. Even the Caspian Sea, whose waters are divided between five countries, poses a contentious maritime problem that will not be solved soon.

But Nagorno-Karabakh matters because it's part of a multi-dimensional conflict that has recurred in various scales for centuries. At the heart of it are the very Armenians who want their Artsakh to join the homeland. Their aspiration has had deep historical roots since Armenians have lived there, along with Turks, Kurds, and Persians, for millennia. Over time, however, and especially since Transcaucasia – the combination of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan – fell to the Soviets, Nagorno-Karabakh was explicitly made an oblast, or autonomous province, within Azerbaijan.

Yet by the spring of 1988, when glasnost and perestroika were gutting a decrepit Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh was an undisputed majority Armenian enclave and demonstrations – which began in Stepanakert



“NAGORNO-KARABAKH MATTERS BECAUSE IT'S PART OF A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CONFLICT THAT HAS RECURRED IN VARIOUS SCALES FOR CENTURIES”

A CONFLICT SPANNING GENERATIONS

301

The Kingdom of Armenia becomes the first Christian nation thanks to proselytising by St Bartholomew and St Thaddeus. Armenia is soon assailed by the Persian Empire and seeks aid from Byzantium.

1716

Always vulnerable to invasion Eastern Armenia is granted the protection of the hawkish czar, Peter the Great. This momentarily spares the kingdom an occupation by the Ottoman Turks.

1804

The gruelling Russo-Persian War turns the Caucasus into a battlefield. Russia eventually claims parts of Eastern Armenia, which becomes a single protectorate, while the Persians control the capital Yerevan.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

*These men from the NKR
Defense Army wear special
forces uniforms manufactured
in Russia, 2004*



– inspired further demonstrations in Yerevan as thousands expressed solidarity alongside the secessionists. In February that same year, a vote by local Soviet officials in Nagorno-Karabakh favoured unification.

Moscow, knowing this could inflame ethnic hatred, remained cautious and refused to act. This was a prudent move. In 1986, the appointment of a Russian to the Kazakhstan Soviet's highest office sparked riots that were put down with force. Then came the massive earthquake that devastated Yerevan in December 1988. Meanwhile, in Azerbaijan angry mobs launched pogroms against Armenians in the cities of Sumqayit and Baku. History was moving at too fast a pace. A cataclysm was bound to happen.

The People of Ararat

With a total population numbering less than 3 million, Armenia today is a poster child for a small developing country. It's a scenic nation, typical of the greater Caucasus, where rolling hills give way to orchards and snow-capped mountains. Its capital, Yerevan, is an appealing mix of utilitarian apartment blocks and broad avenues. Foreign investors, who are lured by its agricultural sector and mines, bring their money to Armenia.

From the rooftops of Yerevan it's possible to gaze at Mount Ararat, an ancient biblical landmark that symbolises Armenia's despair. The other side of Ararat is controlled by Turkey – whose earlier incarnation, the Ottoman Empire, annexed Armenia in the 16th century and perpetrated the single greatest outrage on its people a hundred years ago. The ultimate lesson is a tragic one. Armenia may survive and endure but it's never completely and totally free, just like Artsakh. This shows in its demographics, where a greater percentage of Armenians are found abroad – Russia, France, and North America host the largest Diaspora communities – than in their homeland.

Armenia's current borders don't reflect its true expanse that stretches well into Turkey and northern Iran. The modern Republic of Armenia subscribes to the territory of 'Eastern' Armenia, namely the chunk annexed by the Russians in the 18th century, minus the Nakhchivan enclave that's part of Azerbaijan.

The Armenian peoples' origins can be traced 9,000 years in the past. Like the Phoenicians, their reach and spread is difficult to measure, ranging from Europe, the Levant, Arabia, and India. This long and twisting heritage, complete with dynasties, martyrs, and embattled kingdoms, does reveal a single recurring thread across two millennia.

Whichever empire seeks to rule the vast frontier between Europe and Asia must control Armenia. At first it was the Romans in 30 BCE. By the time the grand churches of Yerevan were

“ARMENIA'S CURRENT BORDERS DON'T REFLECT ITS TRUE EXPANSE THAT STRETCHES WELL INTO TURKEY AND NORTHERN IRAN”

threatened by the Sassanid Persians, Armenia was recognised as the first truly Christian nation. Therefore, it was natural to seek aid from the first Christian Empire, the Byzantines.

As Constantinople's power ebbed, domination by Islamic Arabs, Islamised Persia and the Mongols would shape the lives and customs of their Armenian subjects. Imperial Russia's involvement with the Christian Armenians only occurred during the reign of the czar, Peter the Great, who sought to chip away at the gunpowder empires, both Ottoman and Safavid, at his doorstep.

It was this constant cycle of warfare, invasion, and displacement that further scattered the Armenian people and lent them cosmopolitanism that benefits their host nations. Almost two centuries of intermittent warfare would culminate in the Armenian protectorate annexed by Czar Nicholas I in 1840. By then the localised interests of the Armenians and the strategic interests of Russia were joined at the hip.

But Christian Armenia under the Russians was a different world from the Armenians across the border that numbered among the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman sultans. Although capable of rendering service to the most powerful Muslim empire in the 19th century, the Armenians risked persecution from their neighbours, the Kurds, and the intrigues conceived by pashas.

It's quite bizarre how the spirit of pan-Turkish nationalism influenced the Ottoman leadership once the Great War broke out. Fearing Russian meddling along their eastern border, a sinister project was undertaken to depopulate the area of its Christian Armenians – even when 100,000 Armenian men had enlisted to fight against the Allies.

The result, of course, was the wholesale persecution, deportation, and slaughter visited on up to 1.5 million Armenian men, women, and children, although this figure is widely disputed.

Caspian fire

The conflict with the Azeris over Nagorno-Karabakh is a parochial dispute that has unfortunately drawn regional giants. After all, the successor states of the three empires (Russian, Persian, Ottoman) who have always vied for the Caucasus each have a stake in the game.

Azeri soldiers feed ammunition belts while another assembles a rocket in preparation for another attack near the village of Gulabird



A statue of Lenin dominates a street occupied by Armenian soldiers

1874

The Nobel brothers of Sweden establish an oil refinery in Baku and strike it rich. 135 years later and Azerbaijan is recognised today as one of the oldest oil producing countries.



1905

The Russian Empire is gripped by revolt as dissatisfaction with Czar Nicholas' rule unites workers, anarchists, and socialists against him. The Czar feigns a compromise then suppresses the revolt.

1915

As the Russian empire is battered on the Eastern front, the Armenian question is decided by Turkey: the plan is a mass displacement to Mesopotamia. The consequences of this policy are mass genocide.

1920

The Armenian genocide decimates Transcaucasia's Christian population, but the chaotic Russian Civil War leads to the short-lived independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Both countries are eventually overrun by Bolshevik forces.

1922

The Transcaucasian republics join the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). This reduces the independence of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan to mere autonomy with their respective capitals subordinate to Moscow.



Turkey and Iran, in particular, are immediately affected by any convulsions within Azerbaijan. For Turkey it's a matter of looking out for a little sibling and trade partner – the Azeris are their co-religionists and speak a Turkic dialect. For Iran, on the other hand, the problem is quite dire. Like Armenia, Azerbaijan's present borders trace the Soviet republic carved out in 1923. The majority of ethnic Azeris reside in Northern Iran. Should a civil war tear Azerbaijan apart, it could spill southward and embroil Tehran.

History does show both Armenia and Azerbaijan share unique commonalities. As a matter of fact, both countries can trace their arrival at modern statehood at the same time. With the Russian empire in disarray, and torn apart by civil war after the October 1917 revolution, the Armenians enjoyed a nationalist renaissance and short-lived independence. So did Azerbaijan who possessed a thriving oil industry judged one of the world's largest.

In less than two years, each of these incarnations were undone. The dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire by the Treaty of Sèvres set the Turks on the warpath. In 1920, independent Armenia was attacked on two fronts. The Bolsheviks would overrun Yerevan by year's end and further bloodshed followed as a Soviet Armenian regime imposed its control.

In 1923, the whole of Transcaucasia was absorbed by the Soviet Union with the ethnic Georgian, Joseph Stalin, making it explicitly clear that the region known as Karabakh, ruled by ethnic Armenian clans, called meliks, was included. Since the 16th century, this was part of Azerbaijan whose valuable oil wells would fuel Moscow's plans for re-industrialisation.

Today, Azerbaijan is shaped by its oil and the legacy of strongmen. Prospecting along the Caspian began around the same time swashbuckling entrepreneurs were digging wells up and down the eastern United States. It was the foresight of the Nobel brothers, whose business interests had long been patronised by the court of St Petersburg, that brought Azeri oil first to Russia and then to Europe.

Reliance on Azerbaijan's crude only increased during the peak of Stalin's reign and well into the Cold War. It effectively turned Baku into the Caspian's greatest city and cemented the power of one Heydar Aliyev. A former apparatchik (a full time member of the Communist Party) who led the Azerbaijan KGB in the 1960s, Aliyev, became a lackey of Leonid Brezhnev whose hawkish world view, emphasis on arms racing, and dictatorial mien rubbed off on his Azeri counterpart.

Aliyev's star dimmed during the Gorbachev era, but a coup d'etat he masterminded in 1993, during the height of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, established his rule over Azerbaijan. Always a pragmatist, Aliyev brokered the 'deal of the century' to allow a



A defence position in Hadrut, a combat operational zone in Nagorno-Karabakh

1928

The First Five-year Plan helps industrialise the Soviet Union under Stalin. Armenia is swept along by the grand project and its farm labourers begin working in factories en masse.

1943

The Nazis covet Transcaucasia as the gateway to Persia and India. 500,000 Armenians would serve in the Red Army. Soviet Azerbaijan is the main supplier of its fuel.



1944

On 22 June 1944, 1.7 million Soviet troops assault Germany's Army Group Center in Belarus. The offensive is named 'Operation Bagration' after a Georgian aristocrat descended from an ancient Armenian dynasty.

1988

A grass-roots protest movement in the Karabakh enclave agitates for union with Armenia. This sparks a wave of riots across Azerbaijan and mobs are soon targeting ethnic Armenians in Baku.

1991

A failed coup in Moscow hastens the dissolution of the ailing Soviet Union. Separate referendums in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh unanimously vote for secession and independence but Azerbaijan is now girding for war.

consortium of multinational oil companies to do business in Azerbaijan. He skirted the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, ignored Russia, bought arms from Ukraine and Belarus, and built ties with the United States.

When Aliyev passed away in 2003, at the age of 80, he had amassed a fortune and set the stage for his successor, none other than his son Ilham Aliyev, who had in turn begun grooming his 17-year-old son to replace him. A former faculty member at the Moscow State University, and a 'businessman' with unspecified ventures in Turkey, the new Aliyev assumed the presidency in 2004 and has stayed in office ever since.

Under the second Aliyev's leadership, Azerbaijan prospered thanks to high commodity prices and favourable ties with the West. Aliyev made it a personal mission of sorts to re-arm his country for a reckoning with Armenia. Since 2006 Baku's annual defence budget has grown until it consumed five per cent of annual GDP – the highest among post-Soviet states.

The country that isn't

Armenia didn't go down the path of dictatorship but prosperity has eluded it. When the war in Nagorno-Karabakh ended, killing an estimated 30,000 people, it left the rogue province a measure of anxious peace. Owing to Artsakh's location, its hardscrabble citizens were cut off from the homeland except for a narrow highway at the point closest to the Armenian border called the Lachin corridor.

The comical tragedy of this state of affairs can't be emphasised enough because it created real long-term antagonism between former neighbours. For generations, Armenians and Azeris had lived together, inter-married, and shared the same troubles under the Soviet system. In the brave new world of independence, national politics demanded they be mortal enemies. Gutted villages, abandoned for decades now, aren't uncommon in Artsakh. These are where Azeris used to live.

Likewise Armenia wasn't in great shape during the 1990s. During the administration of President Levon Ter-Petrosyan electricity was down to four hours a day. To think Soviet Armenia used to be a manufacturing hub where 40 per cent of the workforce had jobs in various industries. After the 1988 earthquake, and the ensuing war the Russian Federation had no use for Armenian factories, the borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan were closed.

What this national stagnation did accomplish was to intertwine Armenia's own aspirations with those of Artsakh, or Nagorno-Karabakh. The current president, Serzh Sargsyan, along with his two predecessors, Ter-Petrosyan and President Robert Kacharian, are perfect examples of this phenomenon.

A career officer in the Soviet Army, Sargsyan fought alongside the Armenian fedayeen –



Thousands of Armenians and Azeris lost their lives during the brutal six-year Nagorno-Karabakh War



1992

Fighting breaks out in Nagorno-Karabakh as Azeri militias clash with Armenian fighters determined to protect their homes and villages. The war drags on for three years and kills 30,000 people.

1994

A ceasefire ends the hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is now inhabited by less than 150,000 ethnic Armenians aspiring for their independence. Azerbaijan and Armenia proceed to rebuild their battered economies.

2003

A decade since usurping the presidency of Azerbaijan, Haydar Aliyev passes away at age 80. He is replaced by his son, Ilham, who builds airports, monuments, and buildings to memorialise his father.

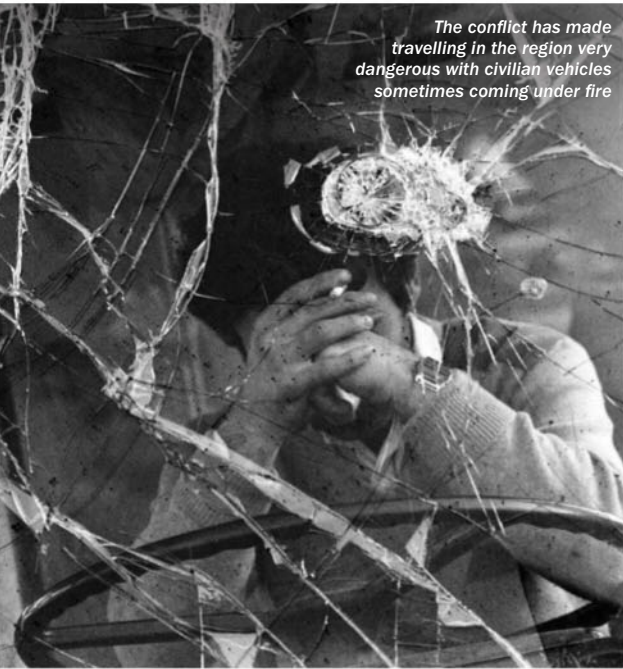


2014

An Armenian Mi-24 Hind gunship is shot down in Nagorno-Karabakh by a shoulder-launched SAM. The incident is the most brazen act of aggression by Azeri forces in more than a decade.

2015

Toward year's end, exchanges of gunfire between Azeri and Armenian troops in Nagorno-Karabakh begins to escalate. Within the next six months more than a hundred are killed on both sides.



The conflict has made travelling in the region very dangerous with civilian vehicles sometimes coming under fire



A T-72 tank transports local militia in the Nagorno-Karabakh War, July 1993

“THE COMICAL TRAGEDY OF THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS CAN’T BE EMPHASISED ENOUGH BECAUSE IT CREATED REAL LONG-TERM ANTAGONISM BETWEEN FORMER NEIGHBOURS”

an Arab word for guerillas – in Artsakh and transitioned to the Armenian armed forces. He was a defence minister for several years until his election in 2008. President Sargsyan calls Artsakh his home, and, despite the overwhelming evidence of the Azeris building their war machine using oil money, he knows Armenia’s own manpower and ties with Russia is more than a match for whatever Baku can throw at his countrymen.

This was very apparent during the battles in April. The exaggerated front line around Nagorno-Karabakh covers its entire 4,400 square kilometre territory. The Azeris launched a blitz across its eastern arc supported by withering artillery strikes that terrorised several villages.

Once the fighting had wound down the Azeris withdrew, having absorbed significant, if unreported, casualties. The heavily armed Armenian militia in Karabakh, who possess substantial stocks of howitzers and tanks, were bloodied as well. But the front line is back to where it was before the violence erupted. What did each side gain?

Months earlier, with Russia and Turkey in a war of words over the quagmire in Syria, Moscow was reported to have discreetly offered a \$200 million loan to Yerevan – for buying arms, of course. This was on top its guarantee of mutual defence via a 5,000-man base in Gyumri not far from the Turkish border. By comparison, for more than a decade now Azerbaijan has paid \$20 billion in imports for

weapons that have given it the best-equipped armed forces in the Caucasus.

Armenia isn’t allowing itself to be left behind. The ace up its sleeve is a minor stockpile of medium-range Scud B and Tochka ballistic missiles. Should the tactical situation in Artsakh ever be reversed – where Azeris gain the upper hand – the final gamble is to target Baku’s pipelines and refineries. Azerbaijan’s air and anti-air missile defences, on the other hand, are quite formidable so this particular option may not be as feasible as it appears.

Both sides are incapable of destroying each other completely. This boils down to fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh over many years. As recent events have shown, this is just as inconclusive.

Armenia’s precarious economy can’t withstand a sustained war. Meanwhile, President Aliyev knows domestic oil reserves are plummeting, so there is less and less cash to spend on the armed forces. Neither can afford a final showdown but each are preparing for it. This, in effect, this may have doomed Nagorno-Karabakh to never know peace.

FURTHER READING

- ★ ‘THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE: FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO MODERN TIMES VOLUME II EDITION’ BY RICHARD V HOVANNISIAN
- ★ ‘AZERBAIJAN: 7 YEARS OF CONFLICT’ BY HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH
- ★ ‘THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT’ BY SVANTE E CORNELL

COLD WAR LITE

With the Armenian and Azeri militaries evenly matched on paper, the 22-year arms race between them is becoming a qualitative one. While Armenia is capable of assembling its own weapons Azerbaijan’s oil and gas exports allows it a defence budget reaching \$4.5 billion.

ARMENIA & NAGORNO-KARABAKH

- ★ 70,000 TROOPS + 20,000 (ARTSAKH)
- ★ 430 TANKS (T-72)
- ★ 200 TRACKED APCS
- ★ 400 WHEELED APCS
- ★ EST. HUNDREDS OF ANTI-TANK MISSILES
- ★ EST. 100 SELF-PROPELLED ARTILLERY
- ★ 196 TOWED ARTILLERY
- ★ EST. 1000 + LIGHT ARTILLERY (MORTARS, ETC)
- ★ 150 MULTI-ROCKET LAUNCHERS
- ★ ASSORTED SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES
- ★ LESS THAN 30 BALLISTIC MISSILES
- ★ 24 COMBAT AIRCRAFT
- ★ 15 COMBAT HELICOPTERS
- ★ N/A WARSHIPS

AZERBAIJAN

- ★ 75,000 TROOPS
- ★ EST. 500 TANKS
- ★ 834 TRACKED APCS
- ★ 1,142 WHEELED APCS
- ★ EST. HUNDREDS OF ANTI-TANK MISSILES
- ★ 190 SELF-PROPELLED ARTILLERY
- ★ 240 TOWED ARTILLERY
- ★ EST. 1,000 + LIGHT ARTILLERY (MORTARS, ETC)
- ★ 190 MULTI-ROCKET LAUNCHERS
- ★ ASSORTED SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES
- ★ UNVERIFIED STOCKPILE OF BALLISTIC MISSILES
- ★ 29 COMBAT AIRCRAFT
- ★ 18 COMBAT HELICOPTERS
- ★ 31 SMALL PATROL CRAFT

2016

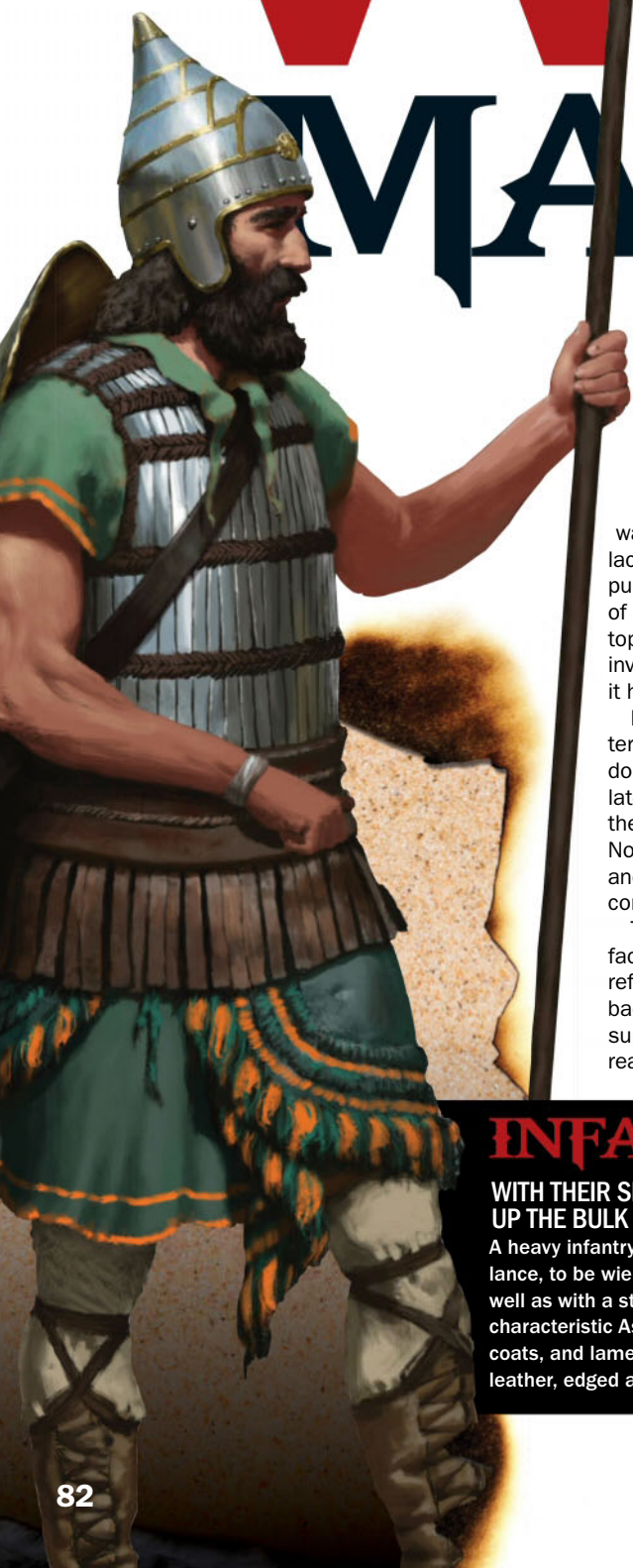
In February, Russia announces a \$200 million loan for a weapons deal with Armenia. The move is seen as a counterbalance against growing Turkish influence over Azerbaijan.

2016

Azeri artillery and tanks break through Armenian lines in Nagorno-Karabakh on 2 April. The fighting lasts for days, and officially ends on 5 April. There are hundreds of casualties on both sides.

THE ASSYRIAN WAR MACHINE

WORDS MARCEL SERR



Discover the greatest army of the Iron Age Middle East, and how it almost captured Jerusalem

The Assyrian Empire originated on the upper Tigris River between the cities of Nimrud, Nineveh and Ashur in what is now known as the north-west of Iraq.

The geo-strategic position of its mainland was somewhat precarious, because the area lacked wood and usable stone for construction purposes, as well as iron ore for the production of weapons, and steppes to breed horses. The topography provided no natural barriers for invaders, meaning if Assyria wanted to survive, it had to conquer its neighbours.

In the 9th century BCE it expanded its territory extensively and emerged as the dominant power of the Middle East. 100 years later, Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BCE) seized the Assyrian crown and killed the royal family. Not only was he an excellent administrative and military reformer, but a gifted general who conquered most of the Middle East.

The Assyrian army was the major instrument facilitating this expansion. Tiglath-Pileser reformed the army, providing it with a strong backbone of professional, full-time soldiers supported by contingents from conquered realms. Commanding a standing army, the

Assyrians were able to wage war all year long and to field a force of 150-200,000 men.

This army was the first to be mainly equipped with iron weapons and armour. Iron metallurgy had probably been invented by the Hittites around 1300 BCE and had spread in the following centuries. Compared with bronze, iron was a superior material because cold forging created stronger and more reliable arms.

A few centuries later, the discovery of tempering made iron the best material for arms production. The widespread availability of iron ore decreased production costs, making it even more attractive. Even minor powers were able to muster and equip formidable armies with affordable, yet reliable weapons. It's no wonder that wars then became much more frequent, and the Assyrians were the first to fully exploit the possibilities of this new Iron Age.

The ancient Assyrians fielded a complex combined-arms fighting force consisting of infantry, chariots, cavalry, sappers and auxiliaries. The king acted as supreme commander and usually led the campaigns. The heavy infantrymen provided the bulk of the army, supported by archers, slingers and shield bearers. The archers were considered as particularly dangerous because their iron arrowheads easily penetrated the enemy armour, while the invention of the quiver increased their shot frequency immensely.

Cavalry and war chariots formed elite forces. Chariots were manned by a driver, an archer and a shield bearer, serving as mobile artillery. If the terrain were suitable, they were deployed as shock troops against the enemy's infantry ranks. When mounted archers were introduced in the 9th century BCE, the cavalry became increasingly important.

INFANTRYMEN

WITH THEIR SPEARS AND SHIELDS, THESE MEN MADE UP THE BULK OF THE ASSYRIAN ARMY

A heavy infantryman would be armed with a two-edged lance, to be wielded as a close-range thrusting weapon, as well as with a straight sword. His armour consisted of the characteristic Assyrian conical iron helmets, knee-long fringed coats, and lamellar body armour. The shield was a cone of leather, edged and embossed with bronze.



The difficult terrain of the Levant reduced the efficiency of these chariots, paving the way for the cavalry as the new heart of the Assyrian offense. In the 7th century BCE, the cavalry had developed into a heavily armed and protected combat troop. The horses represented a high strategic value, which is why the Assyrians invested a lot of effort and resources into breeding, feeding and training.

In open battles, the heavy infantry – joined by archers, slingers and shield bearers – took the centre of the Assyrian line, with cavalry and chariot forces being deployed at the flanks. The battle formation was more than 2,000-metres long and almost 100-metres deep. The archers and slingers usually opened the battle with long-range shots. Afterwards, the chariots and cavalry pushed forward – the chariots were supposed to crush through the enemy's lines, while the cavalry was to exploit the breaches and roll up the enemy's battle. Afterwards, the infantry would deal the final blow.

These armies also excelled in the art of siege warfare. A typical siege began with a complete lockdown of the targeted city, then the generals examined the defence systems and searched for weak spots – usually the city gates. The besieger first prepared huge earth ramps at the identified points to overcome the glacis, and then put the siege engines to work. Mounted on wheels, these consisted of a battering ram with an iron pike and a siege tower, the top of which was covered by hides that were kept wet at all time in order to prevent the tower from catching fire. The tower was manned by archers bombarding the walls with arrows.

Psychosocial warfare also played a part: the Assyrians were infamous for their brutality after capturing a defiant city. This meant that even

the sight of an Assyrian army taking position in front of a city sufficed to make its inhabitants surrender. To control the lands he conquered, the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser III, introduced mass deportation as a regular policy, thereby removing the enemy's elite – the most likely to instigate a rebellion. Areas which had been politically decapitated in such a way were easier to rule.

The Hebrew kingdoms

In the 9th century BCE, the Assyrian Empire became a regional great power of the Middle East and expanded towards the Levant. King Shalmaneser III (859-824 BCE) conducted 21 campaigns during his reign of 35 years, establishing the Assyrian dominance from Babylon to the coast of the Mediterranean. At that time, the small city states and kingdoms of the Levant experienced a period of political power and economic wealth. Among those Levantine realms were the Hebrew kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the land of today's State of Israel.

Under the legendary rule of kings David and Solomon in the 10th century BCE, a unified kingdom had formed. However, at the end of the

Above: The might of the Assyrian and Egyptian armies were smashed by Babylonia at the Battle of Carchemish

ARCHERS

BRINGING DEADLY SHOTS FROM AFAR

Although sometimes simple bows were used, the composite bow was the Assyrians' main offensive weapon. Archers usually operated in pairs with the second man being a shield bearer. The shields made of reeds were bigger than a man and curved on the top in order to protect the archers. The composite bow's shot range was 600 metres. Archers wore the typical conical iron helmet of the early 7th century with hinged earpieces.

century they separated: Israel in the north with its capital, Samaria (today's Sebastiya in the West Bank), was ruled by changing dynasties, whereas Judah in the south was controlled from Jerusalem by the descendants of David.

Most of the time, both kingdoms were fighting each other – with Israel usually dominating due to a larger population and better agricultural conditions than Judah. But both kingdoms prospered in the 9th century, and the territorial expansion of the Assyrians was an existential threat looming over the Levant. A military confrontation remained only a question of time.

Israel and Judah both probably commanded over small standing armies, however, their methods of recruitment and organisation are obscure. Probably, the armies mainly consisted of infantry supported by a limited number of chariots and cavalry units. The infantrymen were armed with javelins, swords and shields and accompanied by archers and slingers.

For small kingdoms like Israel and Judah, it was essential to form military alliances against great powers – they rarely conducted major offensive campaigns by themselves. Most military activities focused on the preparation for sieges and the construction of fortifications. First and foremost, securing the water supply was essential to survival. Springs often originated outside the city walls, making

THE SOURCES

WRITTEN AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES PAINT A COLOURFUL PICTURE OF WARS AND WARFARE IN THE TIME OF THE ASSYRIAN DOMINATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The Old Testament (in particular the books Kings and Chronicles) tells the history of the Hebrew kingdoms of Israel and Judah from the 10th to the 7th century BCE. Although the story is a little biased – especially when it comes to the enemies of the Hebrews – it still remains a valuable source from the period.

Assyrian sources present us with the other side of the story. There are numerous written records that keep much closer to the events than the Bible. The annals of the kings and the eponyms (lists of important Assyrian officials) provide specific information about rulers and events. However, these sources were mainly produced as Assyrian propaganda and are therefore far from unbiased in their account.

Finally, archaeology adds important insights as well, as the traces of war and destruction are still visible today. The excavation of ancient cities like Megiddo, Hazor and Lachish in

Right: The Jerusalem Prism (shown in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem) contains Sennacherib's annals written in Akkadian. In the inscription, the Assyrian king presents his military campaigns, among them the war against the Judean king Hezekiah that has also been recorded in the Bible

modern Israel bring back to life the devastation of Assyrian siege warfare. Findings of weapons, fortifications and the traces of siege engines help us to understand the events that took place 2,700 years ago. A huge relief depicting the Assyrian capture of the Judean city of Lachish in 701 BCE, which was unearthed in the Assyrian capital Nineveh, presents a unique opportunity to study not only warfare techniques, but the appearance of soldiers and weapons as well.

the construction of elaborate water systems essential. The Israelites and Judeans dug immense tunnel systems to secure their access to springs. Until today, visitors of Megiddo, Hazor, and Jerusalem (in today's Israel) have marvelled at the effort and the advanced engineering skills that the contemporary people invested in those infrastructure projects.

The city walls, constructed of worked ashlar blocks (or mud bricks dating back to the Bronze Age) on a steep artificial mound (glacis), were also an important factor. In the early Iron Age, they had consisted of nothing more than the outfacing walls of private dwellings. In the 10th century, however, casemate walls prevailed – a kind of rampart which had two parallel walls with intersections. The space between the outer and inner walls accommodated soldiers or supplies in peacetime. During a siege, the defenders filled this with earth to strengthen the rampart. Since the 9th century BCE, massive walls with towers and bastions had become common.

This innovative defence design was probably caused by siege technique. Before the appearance of the Assyrians in the Levant, attackers had captured cities or strongholds through ladder assaults – with the defenders on their walls enjoying a tactical advantage. As long as a city or a fortress had enough supplies in store, the defenders could simply wait until the attackers ran out of money or patience.

However, the Assyrians changed siege warfare fundamentally through the introduction of new weapon systems and tactics. Straight walls provided the ideal target for the Assyrian tactics, whereas ramparts with advancing towers and battlements presented less vulnerable attack points and gave the defenders the opportunity to take the attackers in crossfire.

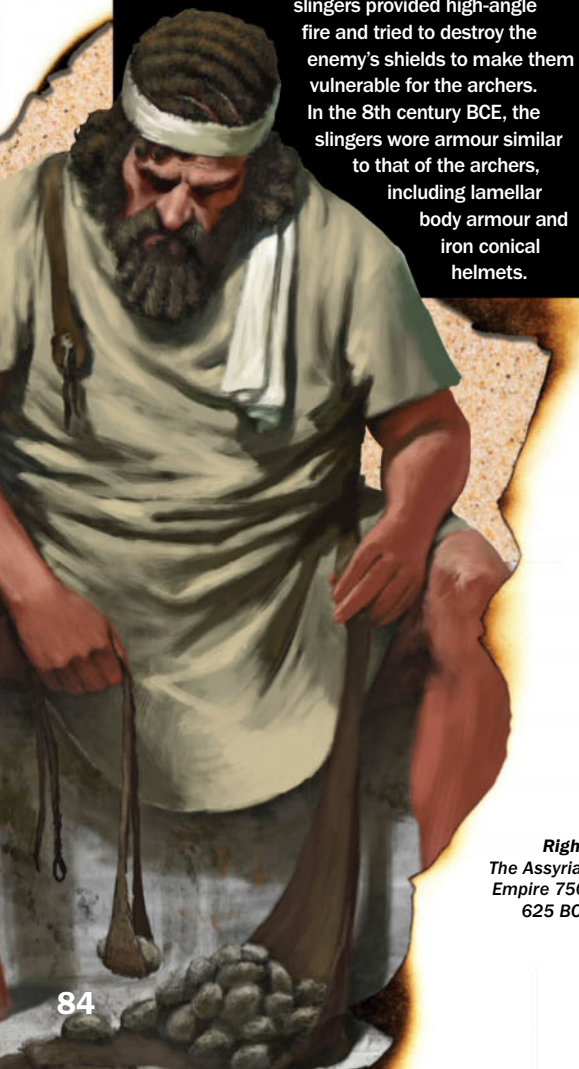
The Assyrian attack on the Levant

Facing the Assyrian threat, 11 Levantine kingdoms formed a defensive alliance. In 853

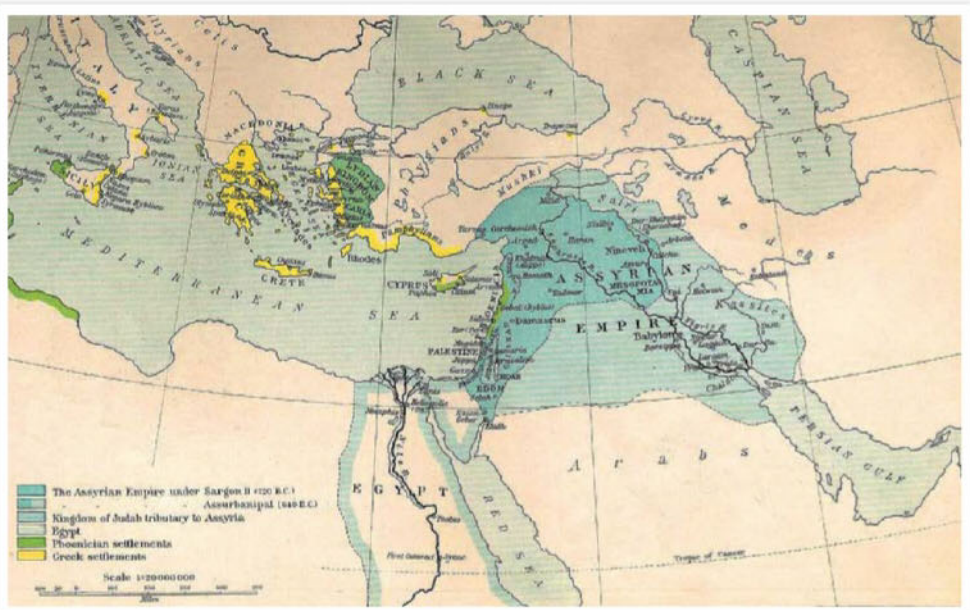
SLINGERS

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE THESE MEN WORE NO ARMOUR OR FOOTWEAR, BUT WERE STILL LETHAL

Deployed as support units for the archers, the slingers provided high-angle fire and tried to destroy the enemy's shields to make them vulnerable for the archers. In the 8th century BCE, the slingers wore armour similar to that of the archers, including lamellar body armour and iron conical helmets.



Right: The Assyrian Empire 750-625 BCE





Paul Ruben's 'The Defeat Of Sennacherib' follows the Biblical account: God's angel saved Jerusalem

BCE, Assyrian ruler Shalmaneser III faced the coalition in the famous battle of Qarqar (today's Tell Qarqur) at the shore of the Orontes River in today's north-western Syria – one of the biggest battles ever fought until then. He led an army of over 70,000 men to the battlefield, including 1,200 cavalymen and 4,000 chariots.

The anti-Assyrian alliance had mustered a formidable force as well. Contemporary sources tell the story of a bloody fight with thousands of soldiers dead. Assyrian accounts present Shalmaneser as the victor, which is, however, doubtful and probably resulted from Assyrian propaganda, because Shalmaneser was hesitating to move further south for years. It took him three more attempts to break the anti-Assyrian alliance and conquer the southern Levant in the 840s BCE. In the end, internal struggles between the Levantine allies brought the coalition down, giving the Assyrians a chance to fight the kingdoms one by one.

The following 150 years were characterised by conflicts between the kingdoms of the Levant and rebellions against the Assyrian hegemon. Israel and Judah survived as Assyrian vassals for the time being. Israel pushed its luck too far by trying to play the regional great powers off against each other, namely Assyria and Egypt. The Assyrians didn't hesitate and crushed Israel in 722-1 BCE. To neutralise an annoying threat in a strategically important buffer area between Mesopotamia and Egypt, the Assyrians deported tens of thousands of inhabitants and resettled people from other parts of the empire there – this was the end of the kingdom of Israel.

The southern Hebrew kingdom, Judah, ruled by King Hezekiah (725-698 BCE), did not follow Israel into the rebellion and was now rewarded by years of political stability, prosperity and even territorial expansion. When the Assyrian king Sargon II died in 705 BCE, Hezekiah made a crucial mistake when he joined with the series of rebellions broke loose in every corner of the Assyrian empire. As soon as the new Assyrian king, Sennacherib (705-681 BCE), consolidated his position at home, he set his army in motion towards the Levant.

Sieges of Lachish and Jerusalem

Sennacherib's campaign against the southern Levant in 701 BCE is one of the most well-documented military events of the Iron Age. Not

only can historians rely on the annals of the Assyrian king and the biblical account – there are also plenty of archaeological remains.

Hezekiah prepared for the consequences of his decisions. He knew that Sennacherib would come for him and that his forces would not stand a chance in an open battle. He had his cities and strongholds readied for protracted sieges – above all the capital of his kingdom, Jerusalem. He extended the city wall, including new quarters of Jerusalem on today's Mount Zion. In addition, he secured the water supply of the city by the construction of a 550-metre long tunnel that diverted the water from Jerusalem's only spring, the Gihon, to a huge pool inside the city walls.

Sennacherib pushed forward along the Mediterranean coast and swept away any attempt at resistance. An increasing number of cities surrendered before it came to a fight. Eventually, Sennacherib turned towards Judah and lay siege to the heavily fortified Judean city of Lachish. Archaeological excavations revealed a 50-60 metre-long ramp, the Assyrians had piled up 19,000 tonnes of soil to create this pathway for their siege engines. Mass graves, hundreds of arrowheads and sling stones, and traces of a horrific fire in the city bear witness of the bloody battle and the destruction. The battle of Lachish has also been depicted in a relief in the palace of Sennacherib in Nineveh.

Despite intensive preparations, Lachish and 45 other Judean strongholds perished. Finally, Sennacherib moved towards Judah's capital, Jerusalem, where he encircled the city according to Assyrian standard siege practice. Apparently, it was just a matter of time until the Assyrian ruler would drive home another victory. Sennacherib's annals claim: "I locked him [Hezekiah] up within Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage."

Suddenly, the Assyrians left. Hezekiah even stayed on his throne. According to the Bible, God sent an angel into the camp of the Assyrians, who had slain most of their army in one night – an indication of a deadly plague in the camp. Assyrian sources tell a different story: Hezekiah paid a high tribute in order to save his city. Besides gold, silver and Judah's elite fighting troops, Sennacherib claimed he, "took out 200,100 people, (...) horses, mules, donkeys, and camels, cattle and sheep, without number, and counted them as spoil."

Another theory suggests that Sennacherib had to leave immediately because a rebellion had broken out in Babylonia. His withdrawal saved Jerusalem – at least for the time being. Judah, however, had suffered dearly from the political plunder of Hezekiah: the deportation of a considerable part of its population affected the economy and it took years for it to recover.

The Assyrian Empire reached its climax in the following decades with the conquest of Thebes, the capital of Egypt. However, internal power struggles led to the demise of the empire. At the end of the 7th century, Assyria fell to the rising power of Babylonia. Desperate, they formed an alliance with their long-term rival: Egypt.

During the Battle of Carchemish (in modern Syria) in 605 BCE, the Babylonian crown prince Nebuchadnezzar dealt the Assyrian Empire its final blow. In the following years, the Babylonian ruler conquered the entire Levant and established Babylon as the new super power in the Middle East.



Images: Alamy, Jose Cabrera

AUXILIARIES

A HITTITE INFANTRYMAN WITH A SPEAR AND A SHIELD MADE OF REEDS

A particular feature of the Hittite troops was the round bronze plate as a protection of the chest, and helmets with crests. Apart from that, the auxiliary infantry troops were largely unarmoured. Auxiliary troops were usually responsible for the occupation in the provinces and could be mustered for support of the regular Assyrian forces in the course of campaigns.

GENERAL DYNAMICS

WORDS TOM GARNER

F-111 AARDVARK

Despite a shaky beginning, the F-111 became a very successful aircraft that saw service in the Vietnam War, Libya and the Gulf War

The F-111 was a multipurpose American fighter-bomber that was capable of supersonic speeds and achieved one of the safest operational records of any aircraft in USAF history. It was originally designed in the early 1960s with Tactical Air Command wanting an aircraft that could operate from shorter runways. However, the task was complicated by the secretary of defence, Robert McNamara, who directed the USAF and US Navy to develop a common aircraft. Both services initially welcomed the joint fighter but there were continuous problems with fixing the plane's weight, engine and drag issues as well as escalating costs and the Navy backed out. Nonetheless, once the teething problems had been fixed, the F-111 was an outstanding aircraft.

Nicknamed 'Aardvark' because of its long-nosed appearance, its pilots described it as,

"A joy to fly," as it was extremely fast and gave a smooth ride, assisted by its variable sweep wings. These allowed the pilot to fly from slow approaches to supersonic speed at sea level. This impressive performance was enabled by a sophisticated radar system that flew the plane at a constant altitude following the Earth's contours. Consequently, F-111s could fly in valleys or over mountains, day or night, regardless of the weather conditions and if any of the system's circuits failed the aircraft automatically initiated a climb.

Accordingly, F-111s were perfect for low-level pinpoint strikes on heavily defended targets, flying in so fast that the enemy didn't know about an attack until the bombs exploded. One F-111 crewman who was shot down over Vietnam recalled how a Vietcong guard quickly slashed his hand sideways and exclaimed to him, "You F-111... whoosh!"



Above: This F-111 was based at Upper Heyford US Air Base in Oxfordshire, England, and is now housed in the American Air Museum as part of Imperial War Museum, Duxford

GENERAL DYNAMICS F-111 AARDVARK

MANUFACTURER: GENERAL DYNAMICS (USA)

INITIAL YEAR OF SERVICE: 1967

CREW: 2

LENGTH: 22.4M (73.49 FT)

WIDTH: 19.2M (62.99 FT)

HEIGHT: 5.22M (17.13 FT)

ENGINES: 2 X PRATT & WHITNEY TF30 TURBOFAN

MAXIMUM SPEED: 2,655 KM/H (1,650 MPH)

MAXIMUM RANGE: 6,760 (4,200 MPH)

ARMAMENT: M61 VULCAN INTERNAL CANNON & MISSION-SPECIFIC ORDNANCE

Four F-111s of the Royal Australian Air Force during a refuelling exercise in 2006.

The RAAF was the last operator of the F-111s and retired them in 2010

**"F-111S WERE PERFECT FOR
LOW-LEVEL PINPOINT STRIKES
ON HEAVILY DEFENDED
TARGETS, FLYING IN SO FAST
THAT THE ENEMY DIDN'T KNOW
ABOUT AN ATTACK UNTIL THE
BOMBS EXPLODED"**

ARMAMENT

The F-111 could carry up to four nuclear weapons with two of the bombs being carried in the internal weapons bay. External ordnance on the wing pylons could include up to 1,500 kilograms of bombs, missiles and rockets. To protect itself, the aircraft was defended with an M61 Vulcan internal cannon. The M61 Vulcan is a six-barrel rotary cannon, which can fire 20 millimetre rounds at the very high rate of 6,000 rounds per minute. It was designed in 1946 and has been in service with the US military since 1959.



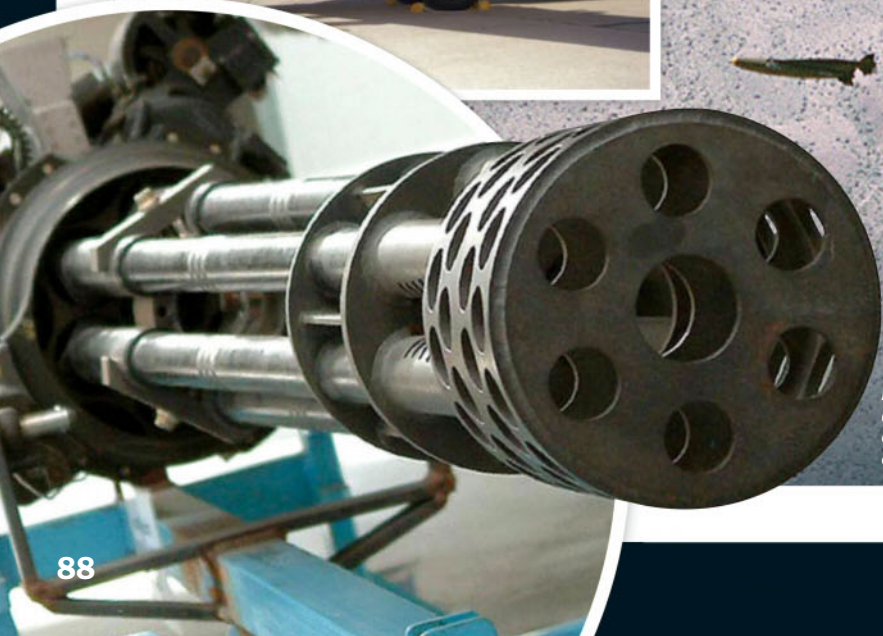
Left and below: The F-111's arsenal was formidable and it was one of the fastest aircraft available that could drop nuclear bombs at short notice



"EXTERNAL ORDNANCE ON THE WING PYLONS COULD INCLUDE UP TO 1,500 KILOGRAMS OF BOMBS, MISSILES AND ROCKETS"



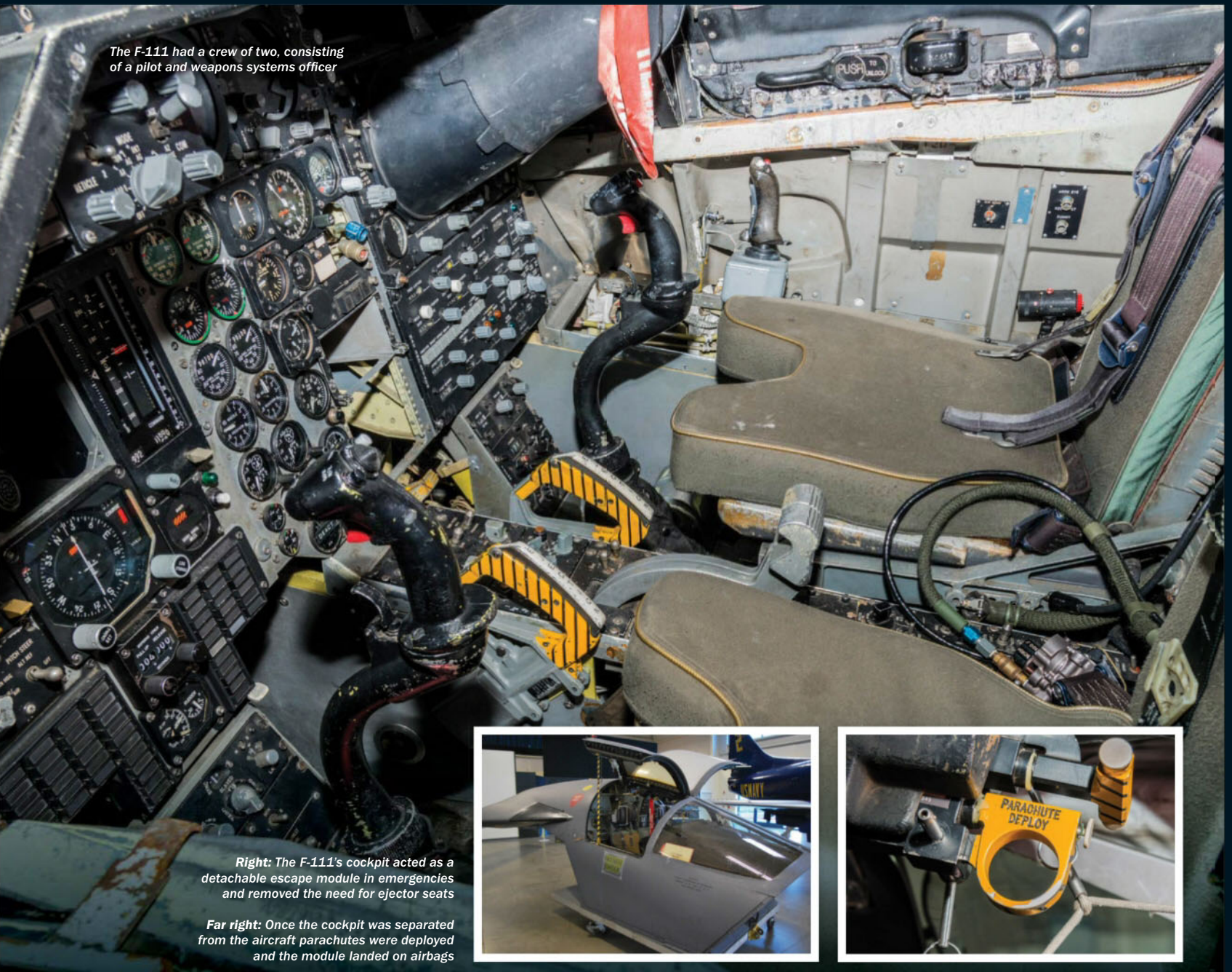
F-111s were designed to carry different weapons. This picture from 1981 shows an F-111 mounted with concrete penetration missiles



Left: M61 Vulcan rotary cannon defended F-111s. Its design is based on the 19th century Gatling gun but it can fire over 6,000 rounds per minute

An F-111A dropping 24 Mark 82 low-drag bombs over a range in Nevada in 1980

The F-111 had a crew of two, consisting of a pilot and weapons systems officer



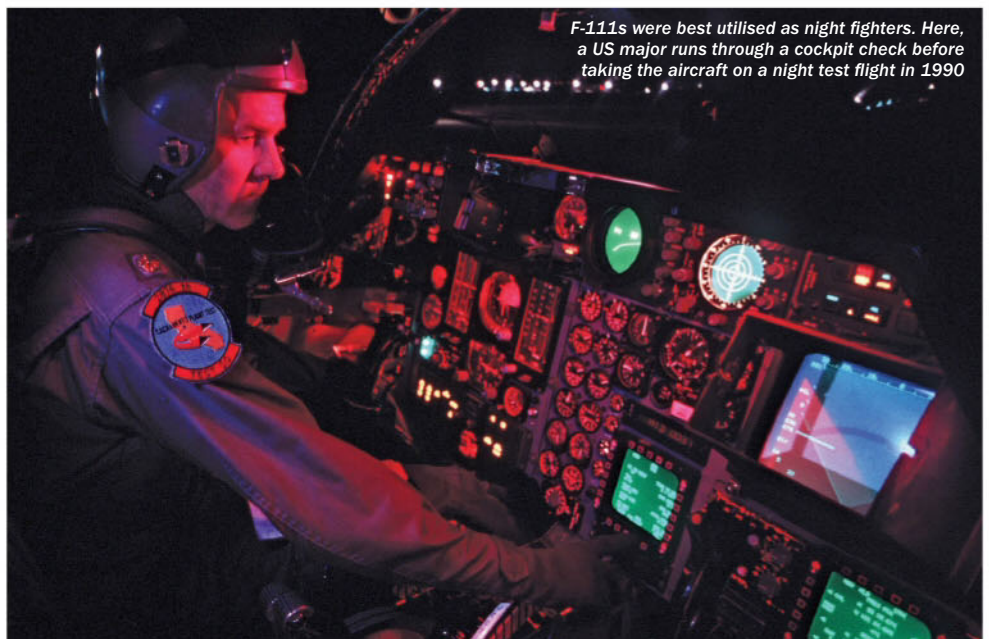
Right: The F-111's cockpit acted as a detachable escape module in emergencies and removed the need for ejector seats

Far right: Once the cockpit was separated from the aircraft parachutes were deployed and the module landed on airbags

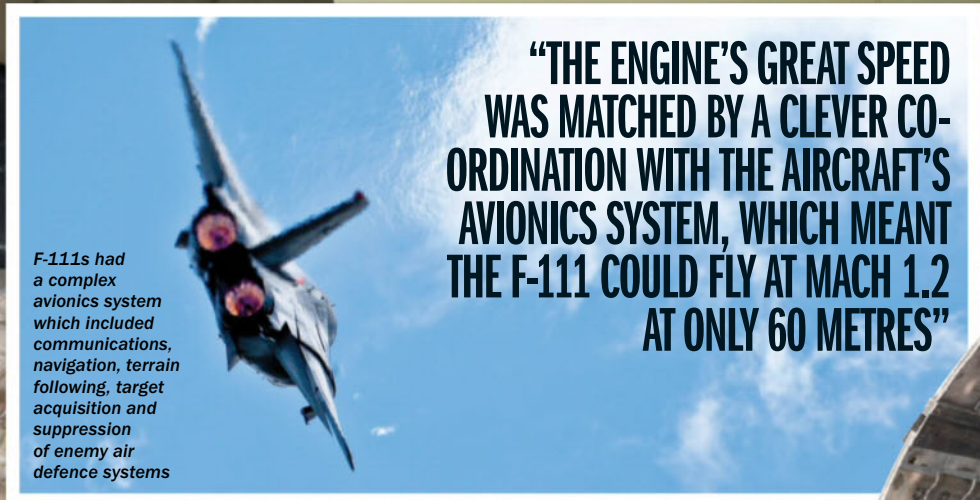
COCKPIT

Two crew members sat side-by-side in an air-conditioned, pressurised cockpit that also served as an innovative emergency escape vehicle. It could act as a survival shelter on land or water. In emergencies, an explosive cutting cord separated the cockpit module from the aircraft, which then descended by parachute. Airbags then cushioned the impact and helped the module to stay afloat on water. The cockpit could be released at any speed or altitude and even underwater. For underwater escapes, the airbags raised the module to the surface after it had been severed from the plane.

“THE COCKPIT COULD BE RELEASED AT ANY SPEED OR ALTITUDE AND EVEN UNDERWATER”

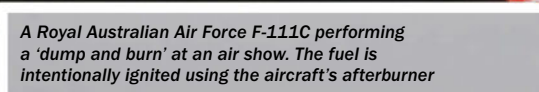


F-111s were best utilised as night fighters. Here, a US major runs through a cockpit check before taking the aircraft on a night test flight in 1990



F-111s had a complex avionics system which included communications, navigation, terrain following, target acquisition and suppression of enemy air defence systems

“THE ENGINE’S GREAT SPEED WAS MATCHED BY A CLEVER COORDINATION WITH THE AIRCRAFT’S AVIONICS SYSTEM, WHICH MEANT THE F-111 COULD FLY AT MACH 1.2 AT ONLY 60 METRES”



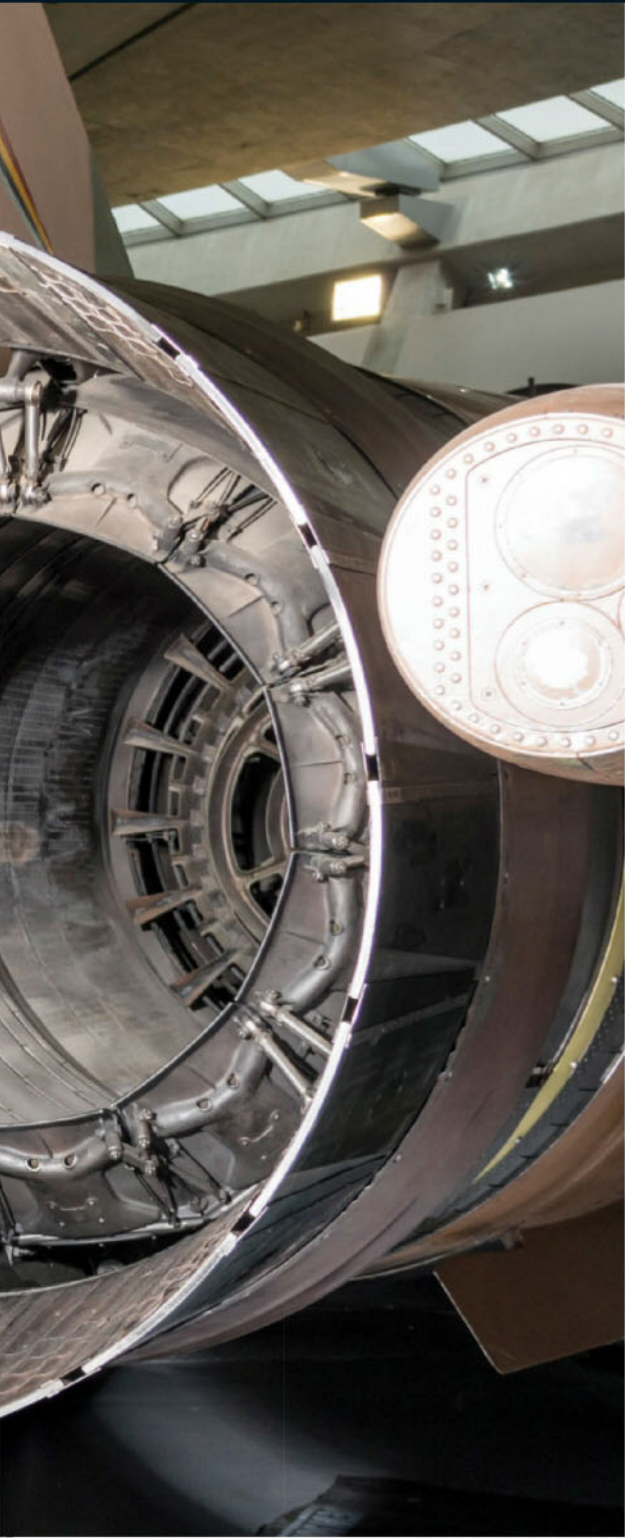
A Royal Australian Air Force F-111C performing a 'dump and burn' at an air show. The fuel is intentionally ignited using the aircraft's afterburner

Above: Two powerful Pratt & Whitney TF30 turbofan engines power the F-111, delivering speeds of over 2,500 km/h

ENGINES

The F-111 was powered by two Pratt & Whitney TF30 afterburning turbofan engines, which made it capable of achieving a top speed of over Mach 2 at 2,655 kilometres per hour. When the aircraft had its maiden flight on 21 December 1964 there were engine problems including compressor surges and stalls. It took the collaboration of the USAF, General Dynamics and even NASA to fix the engine's faults with a major inlet design, but once it was solved the F-111 became fearsome. The engine's great speed was matched by a clever coordination with the aircraft's avionics system, which meant the F-111 could fly at Mach 1.2 at only 60 metres.





This General Dynamics F-111 Aardvark is housed in the fully refurbished and reopened American Air Museum at the Imperial War Museum Duxford in Cambridgeshire. For more

details and information visit: www.iwm.org.uk/visits/iwm-duxford



COMBAT SERVICE

From September 1972 to March 1973 F-111As flew over 4,000 combat sorties over Vietnam with only six combat losses. This gave the F-111A a loss rate of only 0.015 per cent, which made it the most survivable aircraft of the Vietnam War. Over 40 F-111s took part in Operation El Dorado Canyon, the US retaliation raid on Libya after the Berlin bombings in 1986. They performed a night-time raid dropping 54 tonnes of munitions on strike targets with the loss of only one aircraft. Three F-111 squadrons took also part in the Gulf War flying large numbers of sorties and were credited with destroying hundreds of Iraqi vehicles and artillery pieces along with selected attacks on Iraqi command centres.

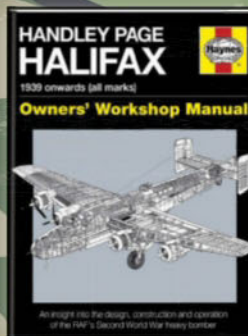
Below: A ground crew prepares a US F-111F for a retaliatory airstrike on Libya at RAF Lakenheath, England. The aircraft is armed with GBU-10 modular glide bombs



An F-111F releasing its load of Mark 82 bombs. Scenes like this were repeated many times during the Gulf War



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BOOK REVIEWS

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HOW THE FRENCH WON WATERLOO (OR THINK THEY DID)

Author: Stephen Clarke

Publisher: Arrow Books **Price:** £8.99

HOW BAD WEATHER, INCOMPETENT GENERALS AND EVEN GOD HIMSELF ROBBED NAPOLEON OF HIS FINEST HOUR

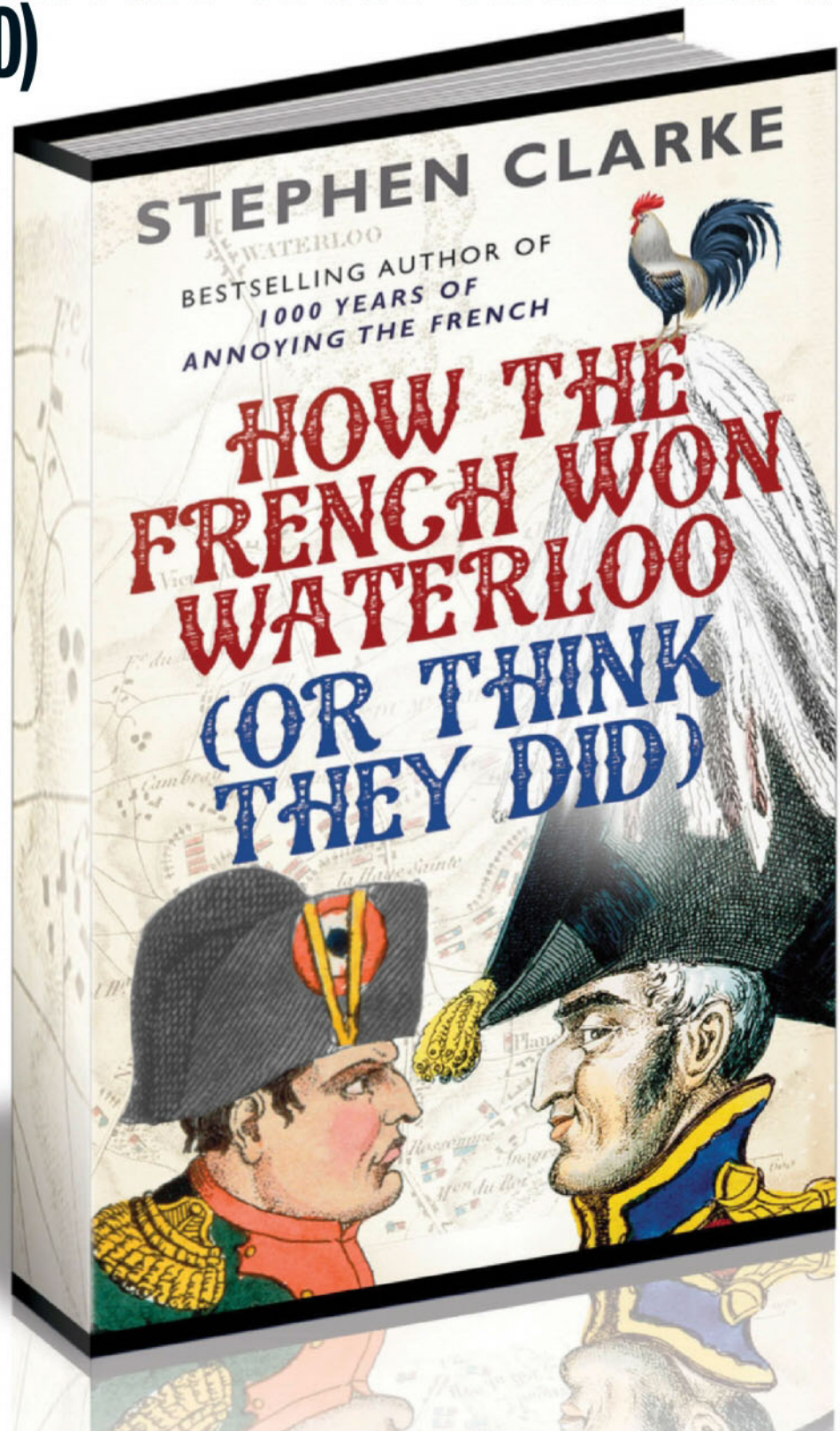
Stephen Clarke has carved a niche for himself in the field of hurling good-natured insults at the French, and he's in fine form in his latest offering. Following joyfully in the footsteps of *1000 Years Of Annoying The French*, this punchy book looks at the state of institutional denial that has enveloped France since the fateful day in June 1815 when Napoleon's last desperate bid for glory came badly unstuck.

Trying to find glory in defeat is nothing new, of course. The 300 Spartans have been immortalised despite an eye-watering casualty rate of 100 per cent, while even us Brits are not immune, revelling in the spectacle of hundreds of little ships crossing the Channel, rather than focusing on the inconvenient truth of why they were heading for Dunkirk in the first place.

But Clarke suggests this goes much further with the French and Waterloo, and he has plenty of evidence to back up his argument. It would perhaps be fairer to say that they cling to a lengthy list of excuses for Napoleon's defeat rather than an actual belief that he somehow won, but that wouldn't have made as catchy a title. It's churlish to quibble anyway, because Clarke's easy style constantly raises a smile, and frequently reveals a deft touch (referring to Napoleon's 'cannonball diplomacy' is neat, as is Clarke's dismissal of French grumblings about the unfairness of the battle as 'sour grapeshot').

The French (like General Cambronne at the battle itself) will no doubt cry 'merde!' to Clarke but, once more, they will be mistaken.

"THIS PUNCHY BOOK LOOKS AT THE STATE OF INSTITUTIONAL DENIAL THAT HAS ENVELOPED FRANCE SINCE THE FATEFUL DAY IN JUNE 1815"



THE SARATOGA CAMPAIGN UNCOVERING AN EMBATTLED LANDSCAPE

Editors: William A Griswold and Donald W Linebaugh
Publisher: University Press of New England **Price:** £21

GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY WITH A FASCINATING STUDY OF THIS IMPORTANT BATTLE LANDSCAPE

Time has not been kind to the battlefields that made up the critical Saratoga campaign of 1777, the most recognisable 'turning point' of the American War of Independence.

With the land reverting to agricultural use almost immediately after General John Burgoyne surrendered his army to the Americans, little visible evidence remains of the fiercely contested battles that helped win independence for the rebellious colonists.

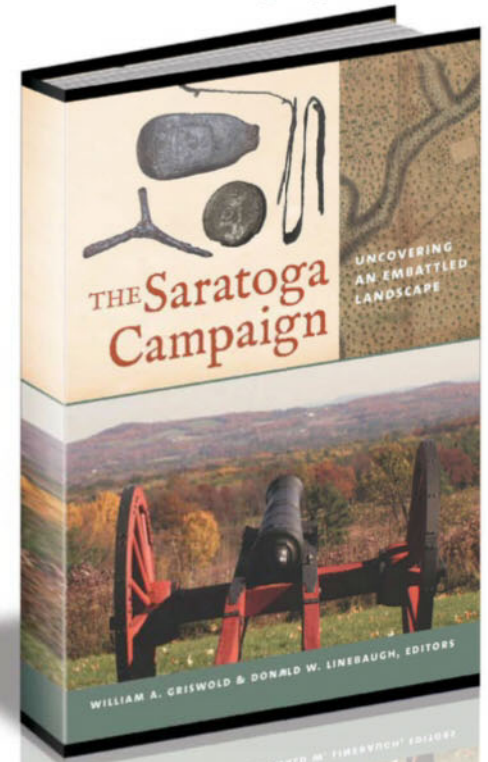
This collection of essays highlights the attempts to bring those battlefields back into focus. It is a synthesis of work that has been underway since the middle of the last century and documents the remarkable efforts being made to rediscover a lost landscape. Undertaking a multi-disciplinary approach,

historians and archaeologists have worked hand in hand to uncover traces of the past. It is an area that has seen great advances over half a century; from the magnetometry and soil coring of the 1970s to modern-day Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR), subtle clues to the layout of defensive works are being uncovered all the time.

Despite the scientific underpinning, this is far from dry material. It will appeal most to serious students of the campaign, of course, but it remains accessible to the more casual reader.

Illustrated throughout with full colour images (including some of the beautiful artwork by American artist Don Troiani), this is a surprisingly attractive and fascinating book that belies its rather academic-looking cover.

"THIS IS FAR FROM DRY MATERIAL. IT WILL APPEAL MOST TO SERIOUS STUDENTS OF THE CAMPAIGN, OF COURSE, BUT IT REMAINS ACCESSIBLE TO THE MORE CASUAL READER"



THE HURRICANE POCKET MANUAL & THE MOSQUITO POCKET MANUAL

Author: Martin Robson **Publisher:** Conway **Price:** £8.99 (each)

EVERYTHING YOU NEEDED TO KNOW ABOUT TWO ICONIC WORLD WAR II AIRCRAFT

Joining the existing *Lancaster Bomber* and *Spitfire Pocket Manuals*, these two little hardback books are veritable treasure troves of data on two more legendary British warplanes. Following the trusted format of their predecessors, each book features a short but illuminating introduction from Dr Martin Robson, lecturer in Strategic Studies at the University of Exeter, and continues with a wealth of original documentation on the development, testing and operational lives of the planes in question.

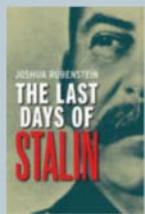
Robson explains how the Hurricane has been unfairly overshadowed by the more glamorous Spitfire, explaining how it played a vital role in the Battle of Britain. With around 14,500 produced, it proved to be a durable, hardy plane that started life as an interceptor and morphed into a close air support role later in the war.

The Mosquito, meanwhile, is rightly hailed as one of the most beautifully designed aircraft from the period, and its reputation was such that German pilots who downed one in its night-fighter guise could claim two kills.

Some of the technical documents included can make for heavy going for any but the most dedicated enthusiast, but detailed reports on sorties and notes from both test pilots and those who flew these planes in anger are often riveting. Including diagrams and photographs, these are the perfect gifts for military aircraft aficionados.



ALL ABOUT
HISTORY
RECOMMENDED READING



THE LAST DAYS OF STALIN

If there ever was a case of poetic justice, it's that of Joseph Stalin's death. Unconventionally, this is where Joshua Rubenstein's *The Last Days Of Stalin* begins, tracing his past backwards as it follows the

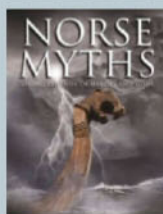
Russian premiere's activities in the years following the end of World War II, charting his activities and examining what might have been. Inevitably, the answer to this question is 'things would have become a hell of a lot worse.' More than anything else, this book highlights what a dangerous prospect Stalin's rule would have been had he survived longer.



THE TOMMIES' MANUAL 1916

For this work, Hannah Holman has searched through hundreds of British army manuals and collated them into a single volume. They give the reader a taste of the plethora of information issued to frontline troops during the war and go

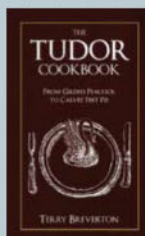
some way to imagining what life would have been like on the Western Front. Need to know how to construct a trench, distinguish a friendly aircraft from an enemy or put a gas mask on a horse? This book has you covered.



NORSE MYTHS: VIKING LEGENDS OF HEROES AND GODS

Viking mythology has lasted through the ages, and is still prevalent in popular culture today. With this book, Dougherty attempts to find out why these

stories are as immortal as the gods they portray. The book also explores the origins of Viking myths and sagas, and analyses the cultural aspects of their religion and how it linked into cultures in neighbouring countries at the time it was practised. This truly is an exploration of Viking culture that everyone can enjoy.



THE TUDOR COOKBOOK

Do you love the Tudors? Do you equally love cooking? Is your love for cooking and the Tudors eclipsed by your hate for swans? You're in luck. *The Tudor Cookbook* collates real dishes from cookbooks of old, such as *The Good Huswives* Juwell

from 1596. The meals, ranging from main courses to desserts (and home remedies) can all be recreated in a modern kitchen – but that's not to say they should be. The instructions for the recipes range from the peculiar to the outright hilarious (for example, "For to seth a pyke. Kill it in the head.") Needless to say, the book is not suitable for vegetarians, or really anyone who gets queasy at the sights of entrails.

SISTERS OF THE SOMME

Author: Penny Starns **Publisher:** The History Press **Price:** £9.99

A REVEALING AND OFTEN TROUBLING LOOK AT THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BATTLEFIELD

The Order of St John of Jerusalem Ambulance Brigade Hospital (better known as the Brigade Hospital), accepted its first patients on 7 September 1915. As World War I descended into the muddy nightmare of trench warfare, this hospital would be at the forefront of the struggle to keep pace with the murderous advances in military technology.

With 18 wards, housed in prefabricated buildings, the Brigade Hospital became recognised as one of the finest facilities available for the treatment of the most severely wounded soldiers from the Western Front.

With an x-ray department and a cardiograph machine, it was at the cutting edge of medical science... and it needed to be. Over the duration of the war, more than 36,000 injured and sick men passed through.

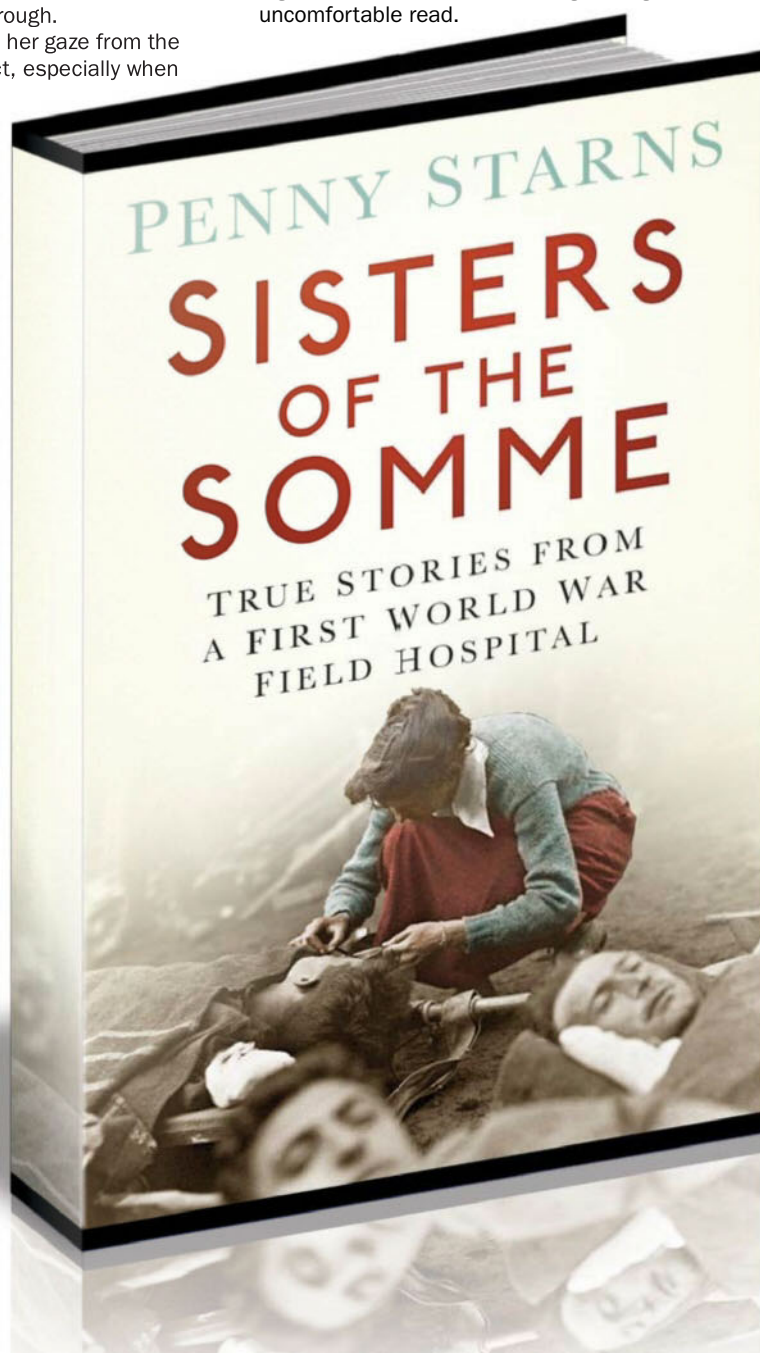
Starns does not avert her gaze from the realities of armed conflict, especially when

the grisly effects of industrialised warfare are dealt with. The description of experimental techniques to find a method for safely removing shrapnel from the brain, for instance, is not for squeamish readers.

It is common knowledge that the lot of the humble Tommy was not a happy one, but Starns sheds further light on the miseries and injustices they faced. For instance, those suffering from the results of 'friendly fire' or accidents would not be eligible for a disability pension after the war, as if their injuries were somehow not as deserving as those inflicted by the enemy.

Focusing on the medical staff, especially the nurses, who did their best in an often nightmarish world, this is an engrossing but uncomfortable read.

"IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT THE LOT OF THE HUMBLE TOMMY WAS NOT A HAPPY ONE, BUT STARN'S SHEDS FURTHER LIGHT ON THE MISERIES AND INJUSTICES THEY FACED"



THE SOMME & VERDUN 1916 REMEMBERED

Writer: Julian Thompson **Publisher:** Carlton Books Ltd
Price: £40 **Released:** 2016

JULIAN THOMPSON'S CENTENARY EDITION OF WORLD WAR I'S MOST VITAL BATTLES IS A TREASURE TROVE OF IMAGES, REPRODUCTIONS, AUDIO INTERVIEWS AND FINE NARRATIVE



There are few years in history that are instantly emotive and are so utterly defined by one or two events, but 1916 is one of the notable exceptions. In what was possibly the most pivotal year in World War I, the Western Front witnessed two of the biggest and most terrible battles the world had yet witnessed: Verdun and the Somme. These titanic clashes have since become bywords for apocalyptic suffering, and for the centenary Major General Julian Thompson's thorough work on the battles has been re-released.

The Somme & Verdun. 1916 Remembered is an excellent introduction to these campaigns and benefits by its close collaboration with the Imperial War Museum. Within its pages are over 30 removable documents, which are integrated throughout the book. Readers can examine diaries, letters, secret documents and reports, booklets and posters. There are also 17 full-colour battle maps that follow their progress. Additionally, there are unique images of artefacts ranging from weapons, uniforms and pieces of equipment. The book also contains an audio CD that

contains interviews with British veterans of the Somme, which are chronologically ordered to tie in with key moments and important aspects of the battle.

As one of Britain's leading military historians, Thompson's book is a balanced work that devotes equal attention to both the Somme and Verdun and makes a convincing case for 1916 being the year that changed the course of the war. These events can often seem extremely complicated and too huge in their scale to be adequately comprehended, but for those seeking an introduction to one of the major moments of 20th century history then this is an excellent and thought-provoking start.



THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN 100 OBJECTS

Author: Peter Doyle
Publisher: The History Press **Price:** £25

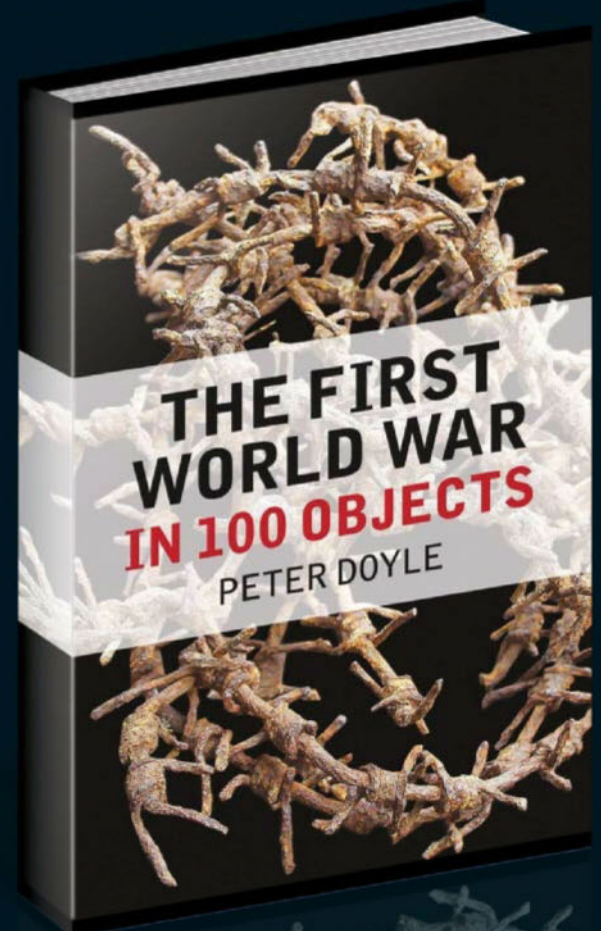
THE STORY OF THE GREAT WAR AS TOLD BY THIS FASCINATING SELECTION OF ARTEFACTS AND LOCATIONS

Last year *History of War* reviewed *The Battle Of Waterloo In 100 Objects* – a beautifully presented collection offering a sobering glimpse into the world of warfare 200 years ago. This is the predecessor to that title, tackling the Great War of a century ago, with military historian Peter Doyle acting as curator of another fine selection of badges, books, uniforms, medals, bayonets and more.

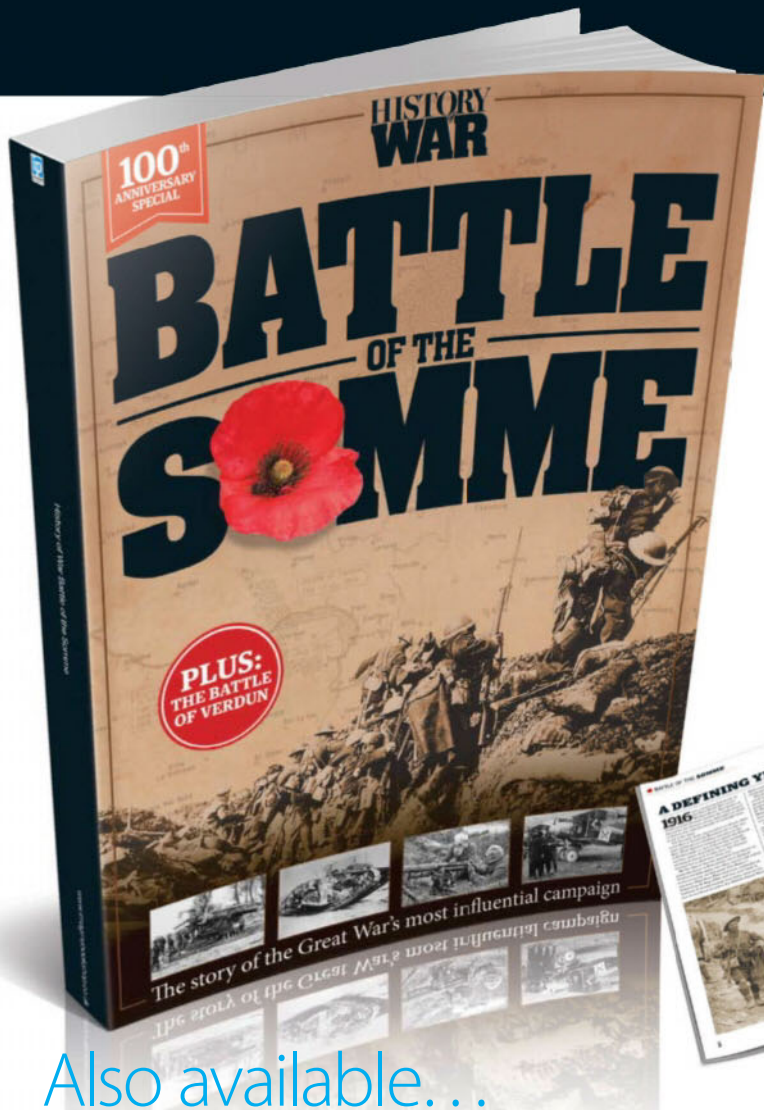
The objects tell the story of the war in its entirety, ranging from recognisable iconic images of the conflict, such as a Kitchener poster, to some more-obscure finds – for instance, a badge of the Chinese Labour Corps. It's Doyle's deliberately eclectic mix of objects that makes the book so appealing, with something to offer both newcomers to the period, as well as grizzled academics.

From a wonderfully detailed image and description of the pickelhaube, you can flick forward just a few pages to find a Dough Boy's field equipment, and from there stumble upon the haunting image of a rudimentary gas mask, circa 1915-16. Pieces like this, along with other treasures such as original cap badges and ID bracelets, give the sense of a real connection with the ordinary people caught up in the war.

“IT'S DOYLE'S DELIBERATELY ECLECTIC MIX OF OBJECTS THAT MAKES THE BOOK SO APPEALING”



From the makers of **HISTORY WAR**

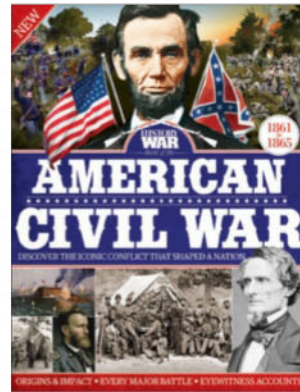
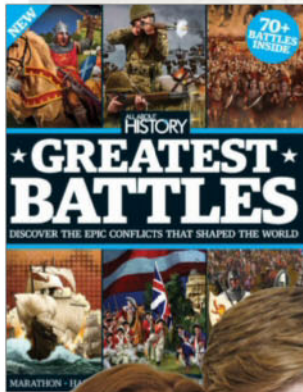


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ROYALIST BRANDING MITT

This unusual relic of the mid-17th century is a shocking reminder of Britain's most divisive struggle

The British Civil Wars (1639-51) were among the most devastating conflicts in the history of the British Isles. During this time a greater proportion of the population at the time was lost than in WWI, with casualties being incurred through battle, disease and atrocities against civilians. Families, communities and regions were torn apart by the bitter struggle between King Charles I and the English Parliament; many men served in their respective forces either by volunteering or conscription.

Because of the horrendous nature of the wars, desertion was rife on both sides but it was a particular headache for Charles's Royalist armies whose declining fortunes against Parliament were matched by an inability to pay its soldiers properly. Pay was often two years in arrears and consequently whole regiments would sometimes desert, which severely hampered Charles's war effort. Wages were not the only reasons for desertion, however, and soldiers were frequently known to change sides or were simply war-weary.

The punishment for leaving the King's army was severe and if caught, Royalist deserters faced a painful humiliation. This mitt, for instance, is full of sharp metal spikes and was used to brand those caught. The appliance would be heated to a high temperature and then clamped onto the palm of the unfortunate victim who would then be branded with the letters 'C R' ('Charles Rex') and a picture of a crown. It was a brutal, but ultimately futile method of maintaining discipline, as the Royalists failed in their campaigns in England, as well as in Scotland and Ireland. The monarchy was abolished, albeit temporarily, in 1649, when Charles was executed by Parliament for treason.

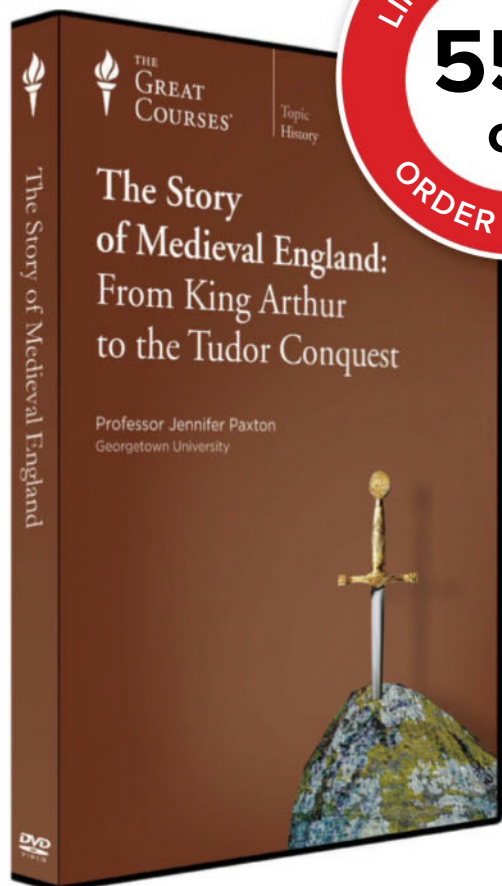
Right: Charles I. The failure of his armies to defeat England's Parliament contributed to his downfall and ultimate execution



Left: This mitt is on display at the National Civil War Centre in Newark, which is open daily from 10am-5pm. For more information visit: www.nationalcivilwarcentre.com



Image: National Civil War Centre



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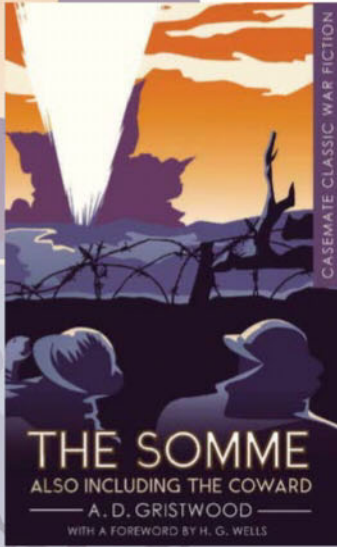
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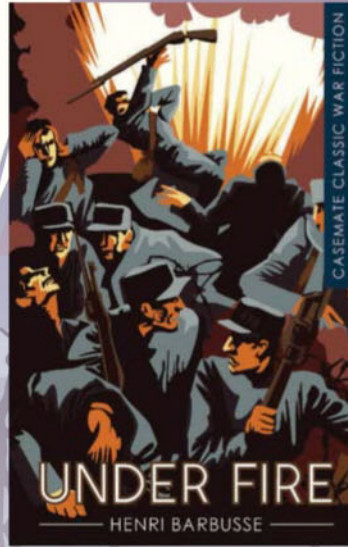


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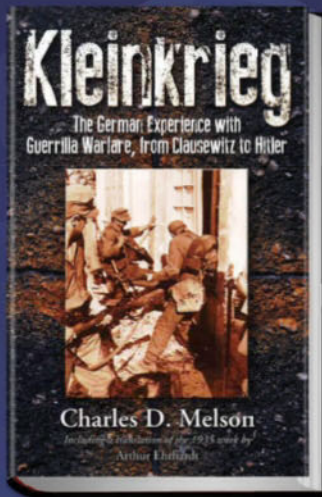
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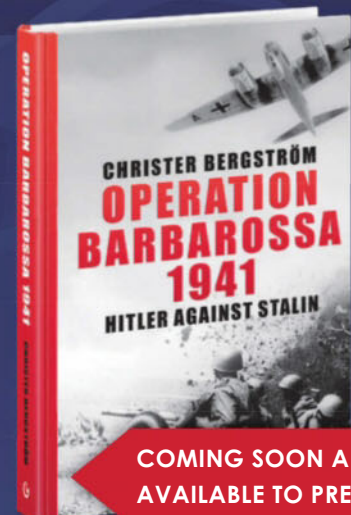
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